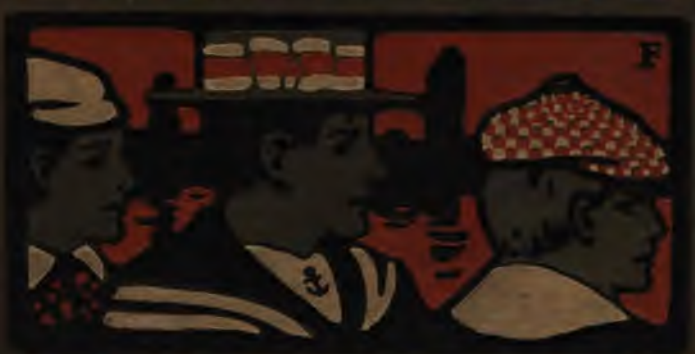
MINNOWS and TRITONS



by B·A·CLARK

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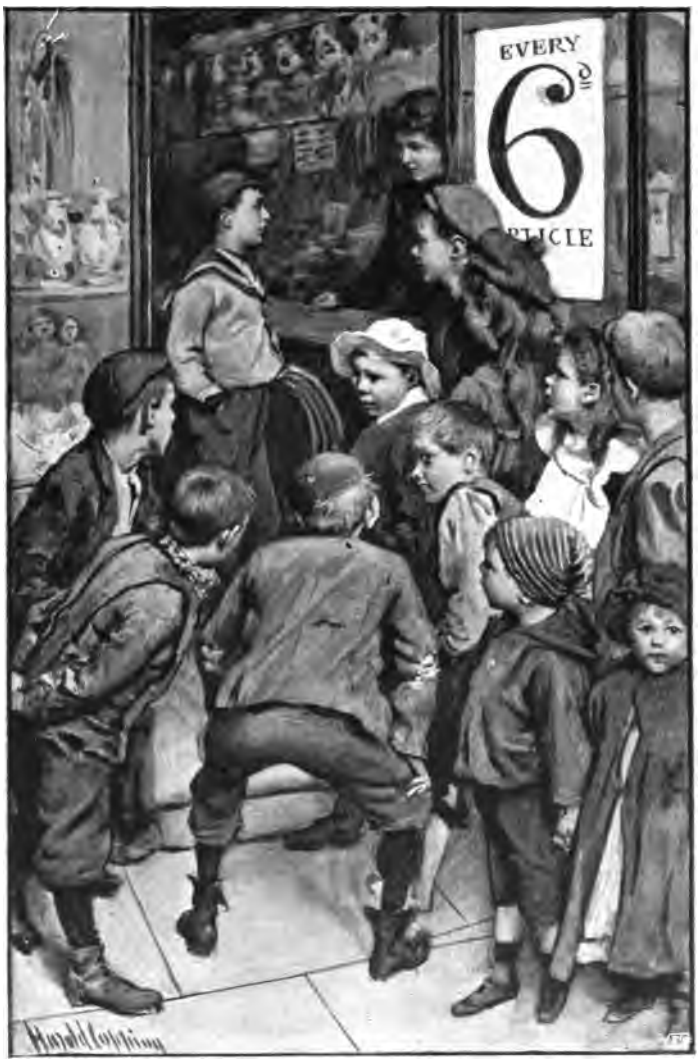

"BUT THEY HEARD, BLESS YOU! AND REPEATED THE REMARK AMONG THEMSELVES."

Minnows & Tritons

BY

B. A. CLARKE

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ILLUSTRATIONS

The Voice of the Turtle

IN Claude Tyrell's younger days it was a constant grief to him that everything seemed tame—everything, that is, touching his own life. There were wild beasts and men in existence, but the possibility of meeting these seemed the privilege of a few happy souls. It was not a question of age or merit. Boys younger than himself had been chased by wolves or happily kidnapped by Red Indians; and, on the other hand, men like his father and uncles (quite excellent men) were as badly circumstanced as himself. On one morning in particular was this feeling strong upon him. He was standing at the top of a flight of cast-iron steps looking down at the gardens, and feeling vaguely conscious that for his despondency the scene was largely responsible. A line of thin, grey houses—none boasting even the quasi-distinction of semi-

detachment—stretched away on both sides interminably, and the strips of gardens belonging to them were depressing to a degree. The ideal was a yellow sea of new gravel, islanded by small circular flower-beds. There was a notable exception—the domain of two young bachelors, who, with no respect for Society's claim, used their garden for purposes of selfish gratification. Its width enabled them to swing hammocks from wall to wall, and in these they would recline of a summer's evening, as blissfully contented as though beneath were beds containing a dozen potted geraniums, instead of a wilderness of grass and weeds, into which, it was said, the neighbours' cats wandered and got lost.

Claude's eyes wearied of the conventional horticulture, with its tale of juvenile wrongs (most of the householders, if not gardeners themselves, were the cause of gardening in others), and dwelt restfully upon the wilderness.

Suddenly Claude's muscles stiffened. There was movement in the long grass, wild life was astir in the jungle. Then he caught a glimpse of a rocky

body pushing a path through the vegetation. He sprang down the steps and swarmed over the wall.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Tyrell, from the dining-room window, saw her youngest son, six gardens away, carrying a tortoise. She lost sight of him in the lee of the wall. Suddenly the tortoise came flying into the air, and then the child's round face (purpled with the effort of climbing) appeared above the brickwork. The process was repeated five times. As he got nearer, his mother could appreciate the desperate efforts he had to put forth. Her own knees felt grated in sympathy.

"It is very cruel," she said, "to keep throwing that poor animal over the walls; but it is certain he could bring it in no other way."

With his prize in his arms, Claude rushed into the house and panted upstairs to the dining-room.

"I've caught him, mother! It's a wild tortoise!"

Dr. Wright, who was with Mrs. Tyrell, threw back his head and laughed heartily.

The light faded from Claude's face. In its way it was a pathetic thing to see the self-reliant hunter reduced in a second to timid childhood. He put the tortoise down on the carpet.

"Isn't it a wild tortoise?" he stammered.

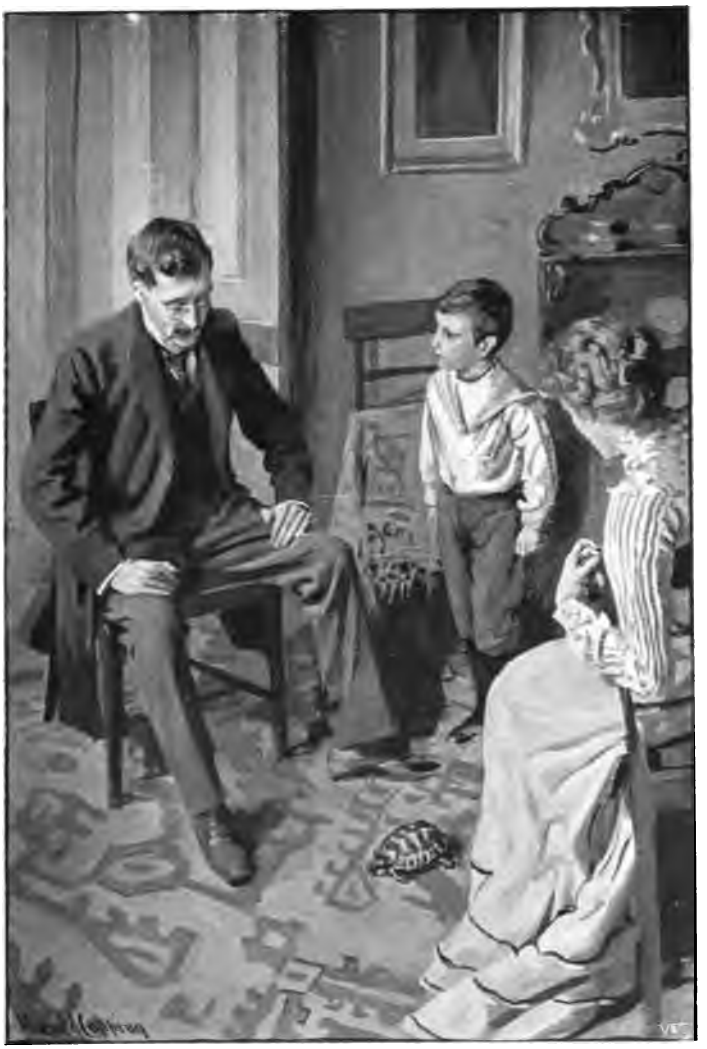
"Not strictly a wild tortoise," said the doctor gravely; "but no doubt it is exceedingly annoyed. But let us see what your sister has to say to it," he added, Margaret's queer little jump being just then audible upon the staircase.

The little girl came running into the room, pushing back the hair from her face, a concession she invariably made to the presence of adults, from the notion that it anticipated criticism, and robbed it of some of its force.

"What do you think of this dangerous beast?" said the doctor. "Claude captured it six gardens from here."

At the sight of the prize, Margaret danced and clapped her hands.

"Oh, mother! a wild tortoise! Isn't Claude a clever boy?"



"'NO DOUBT IT IS EXCEEDINGLY ANNOYED.'"

"It's a shame!" said the doctor hotly. He was realizing what a pity it was that the juvenile point of view, which gives so much pleasure, must conform to the adult, that gives pleasure to no one.

"It is Mr. Roberts' tortoise," said Mrs. Tyrell. "Claude took it by mistake."

Margaret went on her hands and knees after the tortoise, which had taken cover under the sofa. She rose dusty and triumphant.

"Mother, I looked at it closely. It is as wild as ever it can be."

That was just the difference between the two children. When Margaret had a notion that pleased her, adult reasoning to the contrary could effect no lodgment in her mind. Claude, on the other hand, was always being brought up sharply. A word or smile from his elders showed him his doings as they appeared to them, but without the kindly allowance that was being made for his tender years.

"It is just like stealing a kitten," he said. "I dare say I shall get whacked."

"I wish it was me that had caught it," said Margaret stoutly.

"Claude must take it back this evening when Mr. Roberts is home," said Mrs. Tyrell. "And mind, Claude, you are to explain that you thought it was wild," she added, suspecting that her son would rather be thought criminal than over-young.

So in the evening Claude took back the wronged creature and made a stammering apology.

"Really now," said the elder brother, "when you come to think of it, the beast might very well have been a wild tortoise. Of course, in that case, it was likely to do an immense amount of damage, and the whole neighbourhood would be indebted to any one hunting it down."

"If you see any other monsters in our garden," said the younger Mr. Roberts—"lions now, or any such fearful wild-fowl, don't hesitate to shoot."

His face was grave, but Claude could see the laugh in his throat.

"I know it was babyish thinking it was wild; but I am only seven."

"That's all right, old man," said the elder brother hastily. "We weren't making fun of you; and you can have the tortoise to keep."

"Don't throw it over any more walls, though," said the brother. "Remember, it is a Cheapside tortoise, and has been accustomed to a kind home."

Claude stole a shy, sideway glance at them. They were still inclined to laugh at him, he thought; and to be laughed at was the greatest calamity. He did not feel quite at ease until, with the tortoise in his arms, he was descending the front steps.

"Nice little beggar!" said the elder Mr. Roberts, closing the door.

When Claude returned Margaret was triumphant.

"There," she said, "that proves it was wild!" Upon Mr. Roberts' pretended generosity she poured swift, feminine scorn. "If it wasn't wild, it was a pet; and do you think any one would give away a pet to be thrown over walls?"

Under her influence Claude began to think that

the day's doings had not been wholly amiss. Nothing could restore the first fine delusion; but he could see what a starting-point the capture was for conscious make-believe. And before long the tortoise was carrying upon its back a whole world of juvenile inventions.

It was with Margaret that they originated.

"Turtles upon the island!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Then at least we need not starve."

"From the tortoise you make tortoise-shell combs," said Claude. He mentioned also another manufacture, for he had drunk deep of the springs of juvenile lore, and was too young to have forgotten.

His sister, who had not been through a similar course, glanced at him approvingly. Hitherto she had let her younger brother accompany her imaginary adventures from necessity, because, in whatever future she sketched, he claimed a share.

"When I grow up, I shall be an adventuress," she said once.

"So shall I," said Claude promptly.

"But you can't be—boys can't be."

"I shan't be a boy."

What was the good of resisting such a child?

But now it struck her that Claude's company might be a real advantage. Since the coming of the tortoise she had definitely chosen as her career that of shipwrecked voyager, and, aided by Claude's knowledge of industrial processes, she saw that she could carry the art farther than had its most famous professors. They would have upon their island all the animals of *The Swiss Family Robinson,* and Claude would know the hundred articles to be made from their hoofs, horns, and hide. With the same thoroughness they would attack the plants and trees. But she thought it as well to put her brother's knowledge to a further test. She mentioned a few animals at random, and was told a dozen uses for each.

"Where did you learn all that?" she asked admiringly.

"At school. Everybody knows it."

"I don't believe papa knows it."

"Rats!" said Claude indignantly. The suggestion that there was anything outside his father's knowledge was, to him, almost wicked. However, Margaret tried the experiment at the tea-table, her father being present, and from the whole company she could not extract one half the information that her brother—at that moment solacing himself with golden syrup in the nursery—had volunteered. There was a visitor present, an elderly gentleman, who, for all his grey beard, was not ashamed to confess that on these particular subjects he knew nothing.

"You see, my dear, I have had to give so much of my attention to tea"—he was a broker in Mincing Lane—"that my general education has suffered."

"But you know everything about tea," said Margaret kindly. Claude's superiority being proved, she did not wish to put any one (least of all a visitor) to shame.

"No, my dear, not even all about tea."

This confession, astoundingly improbable as it

seemed, was not exaggerated, for when Claude came in to say "Good-night," he beat the tea broker upon his own ground.

"This gentleman, Claude," said Mr. Tyrell, "has tea sent to him from all parts of the world."

"What kinds of tea?" asked Claude.

Mr. Tyrell named two at random, and Mr. Richards, the tea-broker, added a half-dozen more.

"Does he get Shoo Shang tea sent him?"

Mr. Richards had never heard of this kind of tea; but Claude, who really understood the subject, persisted and described the method of cultivation, and when his statements were questioned, produced a tiny yellow-covered guide to knowledge, wherein everything was set down exactly as he had said.

"Why, bless my soul! so it is," said the tea broker. "What ignoramuses you young people must think us!"

That the information was likely to prove valuable to him in his business was shown by his giving Claude a bright shilling. At least, so

Margaret argued, and she realized more clearly than ever the enormous advantage that Claude's encyclopædic knowledge would be to her. She visited him that night when he was in bed, being anxious to get things definitely settled before any one else snapped him up.

"When we are grown up, we really will go on adventures together," she said.

"Rather!" said Claude.

"You won't get married, or bring in any one else; and I won't get married or bring in any one else, either."

"All right," said Claude; "but we couldn't be certain of being shipwrecked. If we kept on going voyages, we'd be pretty sure to be."

"I shall be a woman before you are a man, but I'll just stop at home until you are ready."

"Thank you, Margaret."

Then they shook hands upon their agreement, binding themselves to one another by every form of solemn affirmation known to gently nurtured youth.

"'WHEN WE ARE GROWN UP, WE REALLY WILL GO ON ADVENTURES TOGETHER.'"

From that night they talked, when together, about little except their future home. A desert island, they called it, and at the outset it had been one; but played upon by youthful fancy, it had blossomed exceedingly, and was now producing astonishing flowers and fruit. To make the most of their resources, vegetable and animal, kept Claude constantly busy, and he used to object sometimes that the hunter and the fighter were being lost in the agriculturist and the manufacturer. It was so easy for Margaret to say that she had come upon a dead elephant, and to tell her brother to make the fullest use of it; but that is no small task, as any one who understands elephants will admit; to say nothing of the impossible things she wanted carved from the ivory tusks.

Of course, all this dealing with things gave a wonderful charm to his sister's inventions, and Claude was not insensible to her praise; but it was hard to be kept at work, when she, gun on shoulder, was starting to explore some unvisited portion of their domain. Surely this was the man's privilege!

But then Margaret was eighteen months his senior, and it was really very kind of her to have him at all.

"You are only a very little boy," she said on one occasion, when on account of her sex he attempted to put some disability upon her. If only all boys could be older than all girls, thought Claude, the world would be simpler and happier. But, as a matter of fact, Margaret was much the better explorer. Claude had eyes for little besides lions, and of these, as his sister complained, they had already more than met their needs.

Claude's tortoise remained the inspiration of their play, and they owed far more to it than they realized. Like the real objects in the foreground of a panorama, it gave solidity to all the rest. And, too, its existence was liable to none of the vicissitudes of their other island possessions. In the presence of unsympathetic adults it was not an atom less a tortoise (the stand-by of the shipwrecked mariner from time immemorial) than it had been previously. So long as the tortoise

remained, they had not, after a period of immersion in the actual, to start their make-believe afresh. They had only to see it make one of its periodic dashes for liberty, and the whole romance was living. With flushed cheeks they darted in pursuit, and having turned the tortoise dexterously upon its back, they looked into one another's eyes and read there a great relief.

It was Margaret's desire to have another starting-point of reality that led her to think of building the house in the tree. The idea had fascinated her in *The Swiss Family Robinson,* and she had always thought that the subject might have been treated at greater length. The only tree in the Tyrell's garden was a barren plum tree. It was a particular unaccommodating tree, for its branches afforded no scope for a big boy, while its trunk necessitated too much swarming for the only kind of juvenile at all likely to utilize it. Claude had climbed it once, and upon the strength of this feat discountenanced artificial aids. His earnestness had even impressed Margaret with the feeling that

there was something essentially feminine and inferior in any suggestion of the kind. As against a house in a tree, however, the objection was without weight. One does not swarm up the side of a house; the most manly are not ashamed to make use of steps. Margaret resolved to make a perfectly easy ascent to the branches as a preliminary to the rest of the house-building. She did not mention her purpose to Claude, fearing that until the house was built, or at least begun, he might not be able to catch the right point of view. She waited, therefore, for a half-holiday, when he was going out.

When the opportunity came, the adventuress got from the tool-box a hammer and a handful of tenpenny nails. It was her intention to drive the latter into the trunk at intervals, making two parallel lines, and to support pieces of wood (split-up box-lids) upon these, thus making an approach at once handsome and safe. It would make the ascent quite easy, if a skipping-rope were thrown over the lowest branch, the two ends hanging down.

With the implements and material in her pinafore, the little girl started down the garden. Her mother, with no notion what she was about, watched her go. To the end of Mrs. Tyrell's life the picture will be present to her. Not a day will pass without her seeing it. There is the thin and shabby strip of garden, the bright sunshine, and the child's dark curls rising and falling as she runs. The hat, of faded crimson plush, had been a best one, but had long since come down to garden use. High brown boots come well up the tight little legs. There is another picture that the mother sees only when she is compelled—the same figure lying upon the grass, and the clumsy St. Bernard pup solicitously licking her face. What length of time had intervened? It seemed to Mrs. Tyrell only a few minutes, but it must have been longer, for nails were found quite a distance up the tree.

Margaret was very white when the servants carried her in, and seemed averse from making any movement; but she suffered little, and the boys, who judged accidents by the test of bloodshed,

were not overwhelmingly impressed. They were surprised to find that the doctor had been summoned.

Claude was the first to know the truth, and it was because his bedroom happened to be next to his sister's. Mr. Tyrell was not home until nearly midnight. Going into his daughter's room, he chanced to awaken the youngster. Claude waited for his father to emerge, but there was so much delay that he went out on to the landing and peeped through the crack of the door. Margaret slept, and his father, whose back was towards him, seemed asleep also. To see better, Claude pushed the door a little further open, thereby occasioning a slight squeaking. Mr. Tyrell turned round at the noise, and at the sight of his face Claude rushed back to his bed and drew the clothes over his head. He heard his father go down stairs, and at every leaden step his heart sank.

Margaret kept to her bed. She was weak and easily tired, and the doctor came every day. Otherwise there was very little to indicate the dreadful

thing that had happened. Max and Walter were optimistic, and spoke of seeing her running about in a week or two; but Claude *knew,* and although he spoke to no one upon the subject, his mind was exercised continually by the tragedy and by its bearing upon his own conduct. He was much in the sick-room, he and the tortoise—one of many hundreds that lay basking in the sun, he told his sister, for she took long views and liked to be assured that supplies were certain. The island game continued; but Claude played it now with a troubled conscience.

"We really will go voyages when we grow up," the invalid would say, more frequently now than before.

How could it be right to encourage her in such falsehoods? Margaret never could be an adventuress; so much, at least, was certain. If Claude went, it must be alone. But could he go alone? Did he even want to? He had resented his sister's domineering; but for all that, he had come to rely upon it. Besides, it was really Margaret's island,

and there seemed something mean about occupying it in her absence. Without being clear as to his own preference, Claude resolved to interpret his compact with his sister generously, and to consider himself bound to her for life. This made it easy for him to meet an attack that was suddenly sprung upon him.

"You don't think I could go on lying here until I am a woman?" said Margaret.

"I dunno," replied Claude.

"Anyway, I'd be sure to get well some time."

"I suppose so," said Claude gloomily.

"You know I promised to wait for you until you were a man. That makes it only fair you should wait a year or two for me."

"I will wait for you," said Claude, "until you are thirty."

Margaret laughed. No children really believe that they will ever be thirty.

"But I bet I will soon be all right," she said; and the cloud over her spirits dispersed as quickly as it had gathered.

But for the rest of the family the prospect was darkening. The weeks slipped away, and with them the last faint hopes. Before burying them, Mr. Tyrell called in the services of a famous spine specialist. The physician arrived, and Margaret found the momentous interview—how momentous she did not guess—less formidable than she had feared. The great doctor was just a kindly old gentleman, and although she was a little frightened when he began to examine her, he talked so pleasantly that when he took his leave (which he did with a heavy heart, for he had daughters of his own), it seemed to the little girl that they had been having a pleasantly informal chat.

Claude, who had been sent out for a walk, returned just after the physician had gone. It gave him a shock, seeing the coast clear and realizing that the important word had been spoken. That it was a bad word he knew directly he entered the house. Despair seemed to hang in the passage like a fog. At first he feared he would

be greeted with embarrassing sympathy; but the family were all miserable, and seemingly unaware that the blow was worse for him than for them. Max and Walter at least should have recognized that with Margaret he came first. And then he caught sight of the tortoise. What a lot had resulted from its coming into the house! Well, it was all over now, and it would be better to be without this reminder of what could not be. When it was gone, perhaps he would not be asked to endorse so many falsehoods.

The return of the tortoise, compared with its abduction, was a very tame and conventional affair. Claude packed it in a little hamper and left it at No. 113 with his compliments.

"Tell Mr. Roberts we won't be wanting it any more," he said to the servant.

Margaret was asking for Claude when he returned, and he went to her at once; but perhaps it would have been better if he had not.

"I dunno that I care so much for being shipwrecked," he said.

His sister opened her eyes in surprise. How could any one be indifferent to such a glorious experience?

"When I am a man, I would sooner go up to an office like father."

"How silly!"

"I shall wear a top-hat. I will have seven top-hats—one for every day of the week—and we will live together in a house like Mrs. Smith's, with toy banjoes on the drawing-room walls and hundreds of Japanese fans."

"I am not going to play a game like that. I am going to talk about the island."

She began, but lacking the solid foundation of the tortoise to build upon, her fancies collapsed.

"Fetch the tortoise, Claude, and we can play properly."

"I have given it back to Mr. Roberts."

Margaret coloured to the roots of her hair.

"You think that I won't ever get well. You are a horrid, mean little boy, and I won't ever speak to you again!"

"Very well," said Claude; "I will go out and play by myself in the garden. I'd rather."

He got as far as the flight of iron steps, and stopped there thinking.

The servant at No. 113 had restored the tortoise to the garden, and it was now clambering over a piece of dilapidated rockery with a blazing sun upon it, for the afternoon was one of the hottest of the year. Claude saw the island again, with its coral reef and the waving cocoanut palms. Well, he could go adventuring now that his sister had cast him off; but he knew by this time that he would sooner live with her at home, although that meant the unattractive office. And she refused now to have anything to do with him. It was very rough on a fellow who had really tried to do the square thing.

And then Mrs. Tyrell appeared and filled the cup of injustice to the brim.

"What have you been saying to Margaret to make her cry? And I am surprised that this afternoon you could not have kept with her."

"She says she won't ever speak to me again."

"Oh, nonsense! Now run straight in and make it up."

Claude went reluctantly, for he did not for a moment doubt that Margaret's last word to him had been spoken.

Her greeting at first puzzled him. Hearing him enter the room, she turned round and welcomed him with a watery smile.

"You are home early to-night. How many pounds have you earned to-day?"

Claude tumbled to it that they were living together, and that he was a very rich man. This was quite likely, for Margaret had established him in business as a tea broker.

"Papa's friend, Mr. Richards, who was here some time ago, is a tea broker, and he is very well off. You know more about tea than he does, so they would pay you more money."

"I know all there is about tea, but I never heard how to break it," said Claude; "but I expect I could learn."

"I bet you could."

So they played that Claude was a rich tea broker, and Margaret kept house for him; and although it was a poor game compared with the one they had played, there was fun to be squeezed from it if they tried hard.

"When we are both grown up," said Margaret, "we really will always live together."

"We will," said Claude.

"And you won't get married or bring in any one else; and I won't get married or bring in any one else, either."

"Honour bright," said Claude, holding out his hand.

"I suppose you wouldn't say 'Honest Indian' about that?" said Margaret wistfully.

" 'Honest Indian!' " said Claude stoutly.

The little girl gave a sigh of content.

"What I like about 'Honest Indian,' " she said, "is that when that is said, you know everything is quite settled."

The Pretenders

BEFORE the Tyrells moved to the North-West of London, they resided in Merthyr Road, in one of the odd numbers—an important qualification, for the difference at that time between the even numbers and the odd was all the difference between town and country, and not ordinary country at that. Starting from their garden, and stretching away back to the North-Eastern main line, was a tract of waste land, traversed by important ditches, broken by patches of impenetrable undergrowth, and glorified by a mountain range. This was about a hundred yards from the houses, and ran parallel to them for some distance, after which it curved sharply towards the railway and then sank down abruptly to the plain. Juvenile geologists attributed this striking feature

of the scenery to volcanoes, whilst adult speculation radiated from the word "railways." Back in the hoary past, said the elders, before Merthyr Road was thought of, an embankment was begun to connect the North-Eastern system with a railway that never came into existence. But no two persons agreed about any of the details, and the history (if history it were) had become as overgrown with legend as the (alleged) embankment had with coarse grass, Scotch thistles, and flowering weeds. But whether the formation were volcanic, or of the primary railroad period, does not affect this story one atom. The range was there, and it was pierced by mountain passes (if you are hopelessly adult and unintelligent, you can say that these were spots where earth had been removed for railway purposes), and one could journey through them to the open country beyond. And gloomy defiles they were, overhung by terrifying earth cliffs. On the whole, the children from the houses respected this natural frontier; but the boys who lived in the railway cottages that had been built in the delta

between the main line and the shunting-grounds would at times sweep through the passes in fierce predatory bands. Then the Tyrells and their friends retired into their gardens, and even adults feared to come singly forth. Terrible tales were whispered of the ferocity of these boys. One was that they ate thistle-heads whole. The Tyrells would cut thistle-heads open and eat what they called the nut (and very delicious the flavour was, when they could persuade themselves that they tasted anything), but the tale ran that these savages crammed the whole prickly head (some said the whole thistle) into their mouths and throve upon it. What could boys handicapped by soft living and a governess do against such foes? Living thus upon the conquered country, the invaders could maintain a raid a whole day; and when the householders returned from the City, the marauding bands might be seen winding back through the mountains laden with garden spoil. One says "might be seen" advisedly, for as a matter of fact no one but old Jeeks, the jobbing gardener, ever

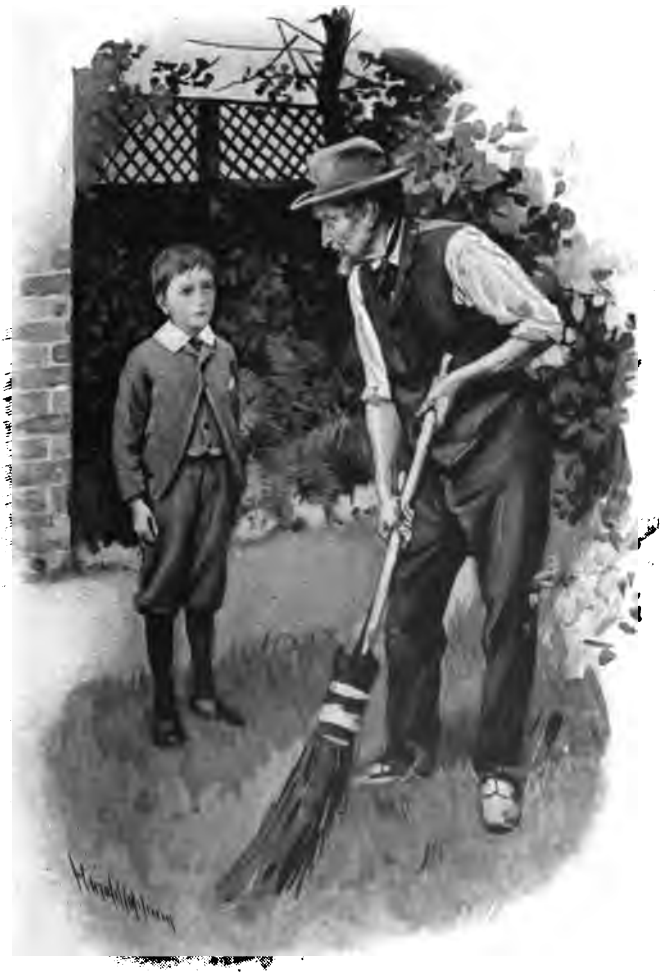
did see them with any plunder; but then it was just in the gardens where he happened to be working that the robberies mostly occurred. The Merthyr Road youngsters called the railway boys cads, and affected to despise them, but in their hearts they knew whose was the nobler life. Black Michael, the leader, they held in acknowledged reverence. This was a hobbledehoy of fifteen, who carried upon him a rich coal deposit and a revolver, and was believed to have upon his hands the unerasable stain of human blood. His legal name was Alfred Good.

Claude, who was learned in *Tales of a Grandfather,* used to talk much about this outlaw, particularly, when chance offered, to Jeeks, who had reasons of his own for encouraging the legend.

"If we had any cattle or horses," said Claude, "he would carry them off every one."

"Aye. I shouldn't wonder at all. He's a holy terror, that boy!"

It happened one day, early in the midsummer holidays (old Jeeks being employed in the Tyrells'



"'AYE, I SHOULDN'T WONDER AT ALL. HE'S A HOLY TERROR, THAT BOY!'"

garden at the time), that the railway boys, who had been quiescent for some weeks, swept down in unprecedented numbers.

> A multitude like which the populous North
> Poured never from her frozen loins to pass
> Rhine or the Danwar.

They devastated the fields, and their progress was stopped only by the high black garden fences. Dirty faces appeared at intervals above these, and challenges were hurled in terms that extorted admiration while they chilled the blood. Black Michael himself was present, threatening to take the life of every man, woman and child upon the entire estate. In the evening they withdrew; but it seemed they must have returned under cover of night, for at breakfast next morning the servant brought in the news that all Mr. Tyrell's fowls—six prize bantams—had been stolen.

"This shall be put a stop to," said Mr. Tyrell; "the neighbours ought to have combined against the annoyance long ago."

"Boardman's father is a Volunteer; he could

come with his rifle," said Claude. "There are two air-guns at 113, and Steggal's uncle has a Chinese sword. The rest of us could tie knives on to poles."

"By the neighbours combining," said Mr. Tyrell patiently, "I meant that they should have sent a joint letter of protest to the railway company, insisting upon their keeping order on their own property. We don't fight our neighbours nowadays with deadly weapons, Claude. Besides, what use would a child like you be if we did?"

"I might kill one of the littler ones," said Claude mildly.

"You are a little donkey," said his father.

Mr. Tyrell made a point of discussing subjects rationally with his children; but often the first exchanges showed that they were looking at the question from a point of view steeply inaccessible to adults; and this despite the fact that he prided himself on possessing an absolute recollection of his own childhood. As a natural consequence he lost his temper.

"On my way to town I shall report this at the police-station," he said, addressing the remark to his eldest son exclusively.

"If the police are coming," said Max, "I will get to work on the case at once, before they trample over the ground and destroy all the clues."

"You are as silly as your brother," said Mr. Tyrell.

Immediately after breakfast Max hurried to the scene of the crime, and began to rush to and fro like one demented, picking up tiny objects, measuring footmarks, every nerve obviously being at breaking tension. The detective rôle was quite a new one for him. He was filling it well, and it seemed strange and sad that Walter and Claude should be so completely indifferent to his intellectual methods. He tried to stimulate their curiosity.

"I can tell you one thing—Black Michael had no finger in this, Black Michael smokes brown paper cigars of his own manufacture. The criminal was smoking shag in a clay pipe."

He held up to view a shred of tobacco and a clay pipe stem.

"Jolly good," said Walter. The way he said it was equivalent to telling his elder brother to run away and play.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" he asked, when Max had returned in a huff to his investigations. "I am going to call out my army, and you shall go with us."

"I don't want to; your army is all play. Black Michael does real things."

"But this is real. We are going to follow their trail, find out where they put the fowls, and then steal them back."

"We may have to follow miles, and miles, and miles. When we get there, perhaps we shall have to be out on the ground waiting until the dead of night."

"That's about the size of it. You will come?"

"I will come if you promise not to have any toy things."

Walter flushed. The babyishness of his army was a sore point with him. It was past eleven before the forces were assembled, and there were long faces when the nature of the expedition was realized. But Walter plunged at once into preparations, and fear could not live long in that cheerful bustle. The army was arranged in three divisions, and so manœuvred that the three defiles were entered simultaneously. Walter himself marched with the centre, carrying one of the air-guns from No. 113. If one of the divisions were opposed, it was to hold the enemy until the others could sweep round and take the foe in the rear. Once safely through the passes, close formation was abandoned (as likely to attract notice), and the boys streamed across the fields in twos and threes until they reached the railway lines. They crossed these, and Walter ordered them to lie down in the shelter of a dry ditch. Beyond this was a low black fence, and then came the railway cottages, huddled under the shelter of the plateau that formed the shunting-grounds. Up to this moment

Walter had not decided whether the expedition were play or deadly earnest. For one thing, he did not know where Black Michael lived, and although at stages in the advance he had professed to see signs that a large force driving fowls and other animals in front of them, had passed along that way the day before, this was merely make-believe, and Claude had protested against its introduction. And now, as if for the express purpose of putting an end to this indecision, their great antagonist himself came strolling over the brow of the embankment. All unconsciously he passed close to the hiding-place, entered the back yard of one of the railway cottages, and bolted the gate behind him. Walter crept forth to reconnoitre. To his delight he found that the fence formed the fourth side of a fowl-house. He could hear birds—the stolen Bantams, no doubt—inside. A prearranged signal brought his followers around him. The fence was high; keeping close to it, they could not be seen from the cottages.

"Well, and what can we do now we are here?"

All but the boldest were beginning to wish that they had not come.

"Our Bantams are in there. You see that square hole for letting the fowls into the fields? Claude will crawl through that and drive them out to us. We shall grab them as they come through."

He selected Claude for this duty because, although not the smallest present, he had a known and snake-like aptitude for crawling through impossible apertures. Besides, he had confidence in the youngster's nerve.

Claude, looking a little anxious, divested himself of coat, collar, and waistcoat. His brother loaded the air-gun, and rested the muzzle through a crack in the fence.

"This is real enough for you, Claudie?" he whispered.

His younger brother, who had already thrown himself upon the ground, looked up with a faint, brave little smile. Walter experienced an unaccustomed movement of remorseful pity. Claude was little more than a valiant babe. Why had he

been exposed to such an ordeal? At the thought his hand stiffened upon the stock of the air-gun. Be wary, now, O Black Michael! Rush out and attempt to take Claude Tyrell at disadvantage, and it shall go hard with you, for all your revolver. Quickly, indeed, must you draw it to anticipate this stern marksman at the fence. Had he emerged from the cottage, Walter would certainly have fired, and he would, in his present mood, had his weapon been a rifle. Few people, however, would care to charge straight up to an air-gun.

Claude, meanwhile, was passing through that dreadful period that comes in such adventures, when having got a certain distance, it seems that the remainder of one's days must be spent just there; for never will it be possible to move an inch forward or back. The terror passed, and he was amongst the fowls. To his relief there was but one apartment, and that quite dark. Evidently the fowls were meant to take their exercise in the fields. It was quite an easy task driving them out to his brother, but the riot that ensued, the cluck-

ings and squawkings and flutterings of wings, made him anxious to be gone. But it would never do to yield to panic. This squirming through small holes needs all one's nerve. He came through more quickly this time, Walter giving him a helpful, if somewhat scraping pull.

"Good man! We have collared four fowls; the others must go. Don't wait to put on your things."

Nothing was attempted in the nature of an orderly retreat. Until the defiles were gained every boy ran his hardest, except Walter, who loyally covered the rear.

But the *morale* of the force was unshaken. The four boys that had captured fowls were heroes, but Claude's glory eclipsed all.

"And before he came away," said Walter, "he fastened the cottage door and set fire to the whole place. By this time Black Michael and his mother are burned to ashes."

"I never," said Claude indignantly. It was sickening. Something *real* had been accomplished, something that made this morning's work stand out

from any other's, and here was Walter introducing this inferior element of make-belief quite gratuitously.

But so far Claude had not seen the recaptures.

"Let's have a look at them. I hope Beauty is one."

"There has been a mistake," said Walter awkwardly. "They are not our fowls at all. I don't know if you think it matters."

Claude was disappointed that his favourites had not been recovered, but otherwise was undisturbed.

"It's tit for tat."

"But don't you see? Very likely Black Michael didn't steal our fowls."

"Then it was a raid," said Claude, "and we had a right to take everything."

"Your father came back after visiting the police-station," said Mrs. Tyrell at dinner. "A detective is coming round this afternoon."

Here was a coil indeed! It would be easy enough to say the birds had come back; but ten to one the police had been informed that they were

Bantams, and anything less like Bantams than the present ungainly occupants of the fowl-house could not be imagined.

"Let's bring old Max into it," said Walter after dinner. "He does not give much for the police."

They found their eldest brother improvising upon the pianoforte. He did not learn the instrument, and until to-day had scarcely touched it. The effect was not actually musical, but it seemed to be assisting thought.

"I say, Max, old man, you might listen. We're in a scrape with the police."

At the word "police," Max, who had seemed all unconscious of their presence, turned round sharply.

"What's the row?"

They informed him.

"I told you for certain that it wasn't Black Michael."

"I know; but we thought you were just pretending."

"Did you, though? I don't know how to help you. But I'll think what can be done."

He faced the keys again and thumped away vigorously.

"I can always think out a difficult problem better with the aid of a musical instrument."

Claude and Walter watched him admiringly, but with pardonable impatience.

"I think there is a way," he said, "if the police give us a couple of hours."

"Oh! do please hurry!" said Claude.

At that moment there came a heavy thump upon the front door.

Mrs. Tyrell bustled into the drawing-room.

"Max, the detective has come, and you must see him."

"Mind you kids keep your mouths shut," Max found opportunity to whisper. Then he went into the hall and received the great man with an easy nod. Now, and throughout the interview, his face was as a mask, stonily impenetrable. Max Tyrell was famed for this power at school.

The younger boys followed out to see the human bloodhound. They saw a huge man, well over six feet high, very red and stout, and his neck measurement was nearly half that of his waist. He was that rarest of phenomena in the police force—a man so vast that his feet did not seem out of proportion.

Max led the way into the garden.

"I understand that you suspect the boys from the railway cottages," said the official, reading very deliberately from a leather pocket-book, "and particularly one known by the name of Black Michael?"

"Ridiculous!"

"This is what the gentleman said, anyway."

"Look at the fence," said Max. "Look at the gravel paths and the flower-beds."

The detective turned a sagacious eye upon each in turn.

"Blest if I can see anything."

"Do you still think that the theft could have been the work of boys?"

"Look here," said Mr. Pierce, the detective, gruffly, "if you know any facts, you are bound to reveal them—that is law. But if not, I will trouble you to let me conduct this inquiry in my own way."

"Examining the field just outside our garden this morning," said Max, "I found these."

He produced a clay pipe-stem, a broken boot-lace, and a hob-nail.

"You had better keep them," said Mr. Pierce. "If you give them to me, I shall throw them over the wall."

"These clues tell me," said Max, "that the crime was committed by a man from Yorkshire between sixty and seventy years of age."

"Well, take my advice and don't believe them. Now, if you'll kindly give me the key of the fowl-house, I need not trouble you further."

This was what Max wanted to prevent. But Mr. Pierce got his way, and the door being opened, revealed four large Cochin Chinas at roost.

"They have evidently managed to make their escape," said Max, "and have returned to us."

For the moment Mr. Pierce did not notice that anything was amiss. Unfortunately, he took out his pocket-book to make some fresh notes, and his eye caught something that had been written there previously.

"Hold hard a minute!" he said to Max, who was for relocking the door. "The information given was that the only fowls you owned were Bantams."

"Prize Bantams," said Max correctingly.

"These are far too large for Bantams."

"They were considered fine birds at the show. They took the prize for size."

"No one ever saw Bantams like that."

"That is just what makes them so valuable."

"My next-door neighbour keeps Bantams, and I tell you they are not a quarter the size of these birds—not a quarter."

"I expect," said Max, "he does not feed them properly. You know, Bantams won't thrive on

everything. Potato peelings, now, is one of the worst things. You can see them shrink on that diet."

Walter and Claude, who were all of a tremble throughout the interview, could not resist a snigger.

Mr. Pierce flew into a passion.

"I am being made a fool of, I can see that very clearly. There's some nonsense at the back of this —perhaps worse. I shall come again this evening, when the gentleman is at home, and perhaps you will wish you had kept a civil tongue in your head."

"That is all right," said Max reassuringly, when the great man had gone. "Now we must have a word with the thief. I have ordered him to be here at half-past four, and I don't think he will be late."

"Who is it, Max? Oh! do tell us!"

"Old Jeeks, of course. He gave himself away talking that rubbish about Black Michael and the feud. No one but a silly kid like young Claude could be stuffed with rot like that. He has been

"'HOLD HARD A MINUTE!' HE SAID TO MAX, WHO WAS FOR RELOCKING THE DOOR."

stealing things from the gardens all the time, waiting for days when the railway boys were around, so as to lay it on to them."

"Here the old beast comes," said Claude.

Mr. Jeeks pushed open the garden door and stood touching his forehead and grinning nervously. His face was twitching; but then it always did when he smoked.

"Good afternoon, Master Tyrell."

"Well, have you brought back our fowls?"

"They are in a hamper outside."

"Lucky for you. Slip them back through the run, and mind no one sees."

The old man obeyed.

"And you can put the other fowls into your hamper and smuggle *them* back where they came from."

Walter explained where that was.

"How can I do that without being found out?"

"That's your business. You will get locked up sure enough if you don't do what I say."

"All right, Master Tyrell. I didn't mean for to anger you. I have your word if I do this you won't give me away?"

"Well, clear as quickly as you like, and don't ever come back."

"Do you see his boot?" whispered Claude, "it is tied up with string."

"And he is smoking a new clay pipe," said Walter. "I wonder if there is a hob-nail missing from his boot?"

Mr. Jeeks, who had been shuffling about in the fowl-house, now appeared with the hamper upon his shoulder and started across the fields.

"I am sorry for Detective Pierce," said Max. "If he had accepted the clues I offered him the case would have brought him some credit."

The object of the boy's compassion returned in the evening, accompanied by a short and very bow-legged man, in shiny broadcloth and a blue bowler. This new-comer bore himself very strangely, his manner towards Mr. Tyrell being alternately familiar and threatening.

"My fowls have come back, I am glad to say," said Mr. Tyrell.

"Your Bantams," said the stranger, closing one eye and shaking his head reprovingly.

"Who is this man?" said Mr. Tyrell; "is he a member of the Force?"

"He isn't. His name is Pat Rogers, and he is the greatest living authority upon the bull terrier."

"Well! there are no bull terriers here."

"A man like that will know a bit about other things. I have asked him for an opinion upon your Bantams."

"This is not a poultry show, my good man."

"I am trying to carry this through pleasantly," said the detective, "but it won't do to exasperate me. Something queer has been going on, and I am here to find out what."

"You saw Mr. Pierce this afternoon, Max. Have you any notion what he means?"

"He says that our fowls are not Bantams."

"Rubbish!"

"Ah! but it is not rubbish. You said at the station that you owned only Bantams. Now, I ask what are those other fowls? and how do you account for their being on your premises? Other birds are missing besides yours."

"Do you think I steal fowls, or is it one of my sons?"

"I don't accuse any one. I should have thought the birds strayed in accidentally, if your son hadn't been so mighty clever trying to bounce me."

"He said his neighbour's Bantams weren't a quarter the size of ours, and I said they couldn't be getting the right kind of food."

"You hear that, Pat; the young gentleman will give you lessons in raising livestock. He wanted to teach me my business this afternoon."

"If you want the truth," said Mr. Rogers, who had been handling the ornaments on the chimney-piece, "they are not Bantams at all. They're Cochins; that's what they are, and bad bred ones at that. I don't say 'ow they came 'ere, not being my business, but Cochins is what they *are*."

"You shall come straight down into the garden and look at them."

"No need to look. I noo directly George told me what 'e'd seen."

"You will please come now, both of you. And mind, to-morrow I shall report the whole matter to headquarters."

"Perhaps I shall do some reporting," said Mr. Pierce menacingly.

"Now," said Mr. Tyrell, when he had thrown open the tarred door, "walk in and examine the birds."

"Just take a look round, Pat," said the detective carelessly.

When the expert emerged, he stood with his head thrown back and gazing fixedly at the sky. His mouth was wide open.

"Well?" said Mr. Tyrell impatiently.

Mr. Rogers transferred his gaze to the gravel. He slowly scratched his head.

"I don't want to stand here all day," said Mr. Tyrell.

"Before I say anything I must 'ave a word with Mr. Pierce."

A whispered consultation followed, the detective's face lengthening as it proceeded.

Mr. Rogers acted as spokesman. Evidently, he had been directed to put the best face on the blunder possible.

"They are very tidy birds, sir, and I wouldn't mind buying a setting."

"Tidy birds! But what *are* they? You said they were Cochins."

"Orstralian Cochins. The young gentleman will bear me out I said Orstralian Cochins."

"Well, never mind that. What are these?"

"Well, sir, some folk 'ud call 'em Bantams, and some 'ud call 'em Orstralian Cochins."

"Australian fiddlesticks!"

"There I am with you, sir. Orstralian Cochins strictly ain't Cochins at all; but that's the name they go by in the trade. And wonderfully like Bantams they are, too—them Orstralian birds. Run, perhaps, just a shade bigger. I can for-

give a policeman for not being clear which is which."

"They are the biggest Bantams that ever I saw," said the detective sulkily.

"That's where you went off the line, old friend," said the expert. "You 'eard they was prize birds, and you expected too much. You noo Bantams was a small breed, and you thought a prize Bantam would go under a thimble. That's the public all over. Not that old friend Pierce was altogether wrong, mark you. I 'ave seen smaller birds."

"There is no more to be said," growled Mr. Pierce. "I was wrong, and I apologize. If, after that, the gentleman wants to rob a family man of his job, he is not what I take him for."

"All right, officer," said Mr. Tyrell; "we will let the matter drop. And if you and your friend would like a glass of beer before you go, you are more than welcome."

Claude and Walter for the next hour or so followed their brother about with the devotion of two faithful dogs. He soon tired of it.

But Claude was looking out of the window, and could see the difference Max's speech had made. It had removed from the landscape a noble mountain range and two swift rivers, replacing them by half-dry ditches and a paltry mound of earth. It had exterminated an ancient and warlike tribe, which had shown some of the faults of savages but their nobler traits also, and there was no one in their haunts but some foul-mouthed little boys.

"If it comes to that," said Max, "I don't suppose that anything ever is all real—anything interesting. The best part is sure to be pretending."

With this dreary thought revolving in his brain, Claude said "Good-night" and went dejectedly up to bed.

An Attack of the Blues

THE Tyrell children were reared upon bread pudding. There were other things in their dietary, of course, but these were unimportant, merely going to form bones, and to upbuild the outward frame. It was to bread pudding they owed their character. So long as they could remember there had always been bread pudding in the larder —long slabs of it—plain, and ice cold. The first bite, when the boys were upon an expedition, changed the venue—no matter what it had been previously—to the Polar Seas. It was so, they thought, all food must taste in that enchanted land. So long as the meal lasted, their eyes were on the look-out for Sir John Franklin, and the spars of his lost ships. The viand was sufficiently plain—just bread and currents and coldness—nothing more. The boys had even remonstrated when a

new cook, thinking to humour them, had added candied peel and raisins. If the ingredients were altered, they argued, who could say that free access to the pudding would be retained? and a free pudding meant a free universe. They could roam as they pleased. A holiday expedition was the simplest thing imaginable. After breakfast, Max (fourteen) would issue his orders to Walter (eleven), who would thereupon descend to the pantry and cut off as much pudding as the adventure demanded. If they were missing at dinner-time, Mrs. Tyrell sent the servant to the larder to ascertain how far they had gone. "A half pudding, mum," she would report, or three-quarters, as the case might be. The home guard calculated all distances in avoirdupois. The standard was the whole pudding, and represented eighteen miles. The abstraction of this quantity meant that the boys were walking to Boreham, and might be back to supper. Of all outings this was the favourite, the village, otherwise without attraction, being so happily situated that the return journey was the

extreme distance that the eldest of the party could walk. Walter crawled the last five miles, and Claude was cajoled. It is due to Walter and Max to state that Claude's presence formed no part of their plans. They left home by stealth, and found him waiting at the first corner—shapeless by reason of the packets of pudding that distended each of his tiny pockets. It was a sixth sense, his faculty for discovering when there was adventure brewing. Then he fell in at the rear and trotted along doggedly hour after hour, taking no part in the conversation, except to point out the coming milestone, a limitation which went to make his remarks disconnected, sometimes quite painfully so. The others used to think that a stone must have been passed unnoticed. Of other feature of interest in the landscape there was none. The outing was just a pedestrian achievement, the milestones making the record indisputable.

The return journey was a nightmare. Arriving home, the detachment was welcomed with pitying wonder.

[illegible] would say. [illegible]

[illegible]

"Oh, I wish I could go with you," the little girl would say.

As a matter of fact, she had spent [illegible] the [illegible] day.

Mrs. [illegible] took advantage of Claudie's absence sometimes to remonstrate with Max for taking the child so far.

"I did not want him"—this was true enough; "besides he is almost a boy."

It was to remove this "almost" that Claudie endeavored so much. Boyhood was his horizon, that receded as he advanced, for his brothers aged as fast as he, and their standard became yearly more exacting. Time had been when the most unquestioned boyhood was conferred by eight years.

Even on Claude's ninth birthday the goal seemed no nearer, but, if anything, more remote, for ten o'clock saw him taking cover beneath the breakfast-room sofa—distinctly the most babyish act of which he was ever guilty. Mr. and Mrs. Tyrell were out of town, and Max and Walter, it being a half-term holiday, had started for Lord's. Claude was left at home. Claude, the birthday hero, for whom no treat should have been considered excessive! It was the recurrence of this thought that sent him under the sofa. He was too young to enjoy a 'Varsity cricket match, the others had told him, too ignorant to appreciate the game's finer touches.

"Why, you don't even know the players' names," Max had said at breakfast.

If the child could have trusted himself to speak, he could have repeated the names without a blunder. Names! Of the Cambridge Eleven, at least, he could have given all the initials. They were a great side, the Light Blues. Nearly every man had three initials welded (that ultimate test

of true greatness) indissolubly to his surname. You felt it was to make these particular combinations that the letters in question had come into being.

There was not a mile on the Boreham road that had not been shortened by these syllables. The elders had not dreamed that Claude was treasuring up their words.

"You don't even know the players' names," said the boys, and Claude, when their backs were turned, crept under the sofa.

"Absurd, young Claude wanting to come!" said Walter.

"We have not done with him yet," said Max. "I should not be in the least surprised to see him waiting at the corner."

"Why on earth don't the kid get some friend of his own age?" said Walter testily.

They passed Claude's corner safely and drew a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness! What a treat it will be to have a day without him!"

They walked on, congratulating themselves upon

their freedom, but with an odd feeling gaining upon them that there was something missing. The fact is, Claude had thrust himself upon them so persistently that they had grown accustomed to him. It was strange not to hear his odd little half-run at their heels. There was nothing in this of weak sentiment. It is so one gets used to the companionship of a dog. Frankly, the boys felt wretched without their dumb follower. The birthday tradition, too, had its force.

Half way to the railway-station Max called a halt.

"Wait for me at the station. I must go back for something."

"I may as well come, too."

"But I don't want you."

"I believe you are going back to speak to young Claude."

Max turned crimson.

"Do you? Well, just do as you are told, or it will be a jolly sight worse for you."

Max returned alone.

If Walter had witnessed the interview with Claude, he would have acquitted his elder of the charge of unworthy softness.

Max seized the youngster by the ankle and dragged him into the light.

"What are you doing under there?"

"What are you doing home here?"

"You would not enjoy the match."

Claude watched a passing water-cart with exaggerated interest.

"You don't know anything about cricket."

A servant over the way was cleaning a drawing-room window. The child transferred his attention to her.

"You would not care whether Cambridge won or lost."

This was intended as a draw, Claude's partisanship being notorious. It would have distressed him if Oxford had won at spillikins.

"I'd take you if I could see how to manage it."

The servant had finished her window, so Claude, having nothing to look at, turned round.

"We have only three and threepence between us, and it would be too far for you to walk both ways."

"Is it much further than Boreham?"

Max had to admit that it was not so far, and the child ran off to put on his boots.

"I don't know what Walter will say," said the elder boy nervously.

They caught sight of Walter outside the station, looking anxiously down the road.

"I've brought the kid," said Max. "I told him he would get bored to death, but he was so cock-sure he knew better, that I made up my mind he should come and learn a jolly good lesson. You don't stir, mind, until the game is over," he continued, turning upon Claude with quite admirable fierceness.

"That's all very fine, Max, but how about the money?"

"We walk."

"But I have bought the railway tickets."

Claude paled. Even Max was disturbed.

"The ticket-clerk will give us the money back,"

he said hopefully, and sure enough the fares were returned.

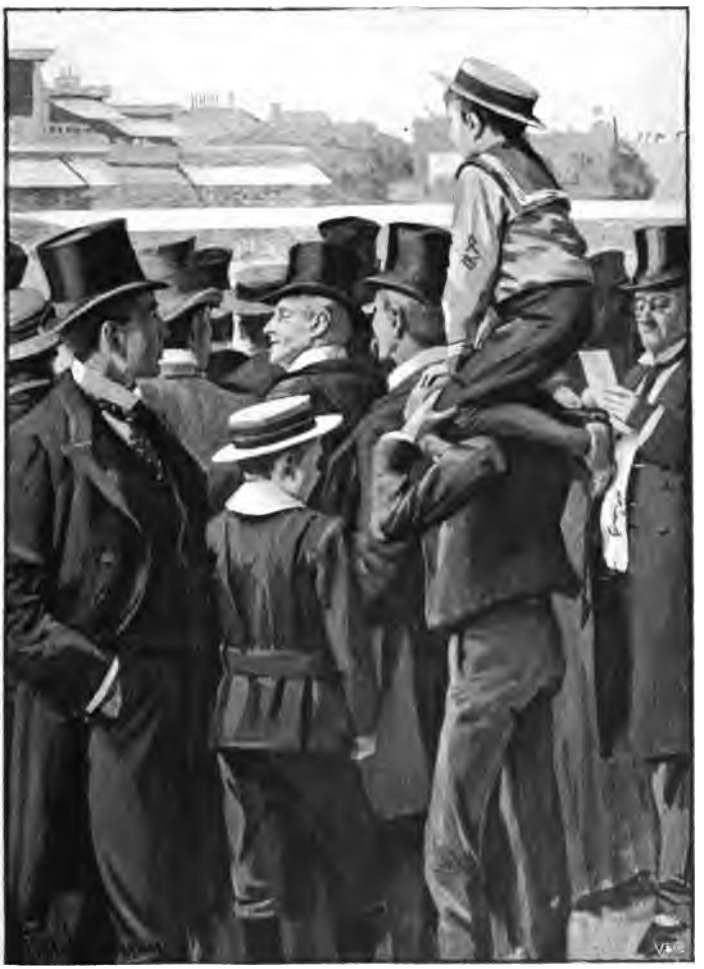
"Of course you didn't think to bring any grub for the kid. I suppose he comes upon ours?"

"Hang it all, man, we have a whole bread pudding!"

"We shan't see a bit of the practice. I don't suppose we shall even get a seat."

Although Walter kept on grumbling, he was really in the best of spirits, far happier than when he had been taking part in a duet instead of a trio.

This walk differed from others in one respect, that Claude, being now recognized, came up into line. Walter and Max even allowed him a share in the conversation, being careful, however, as a disciplinary precaution, to contradict what he said. Either Lord's was farther than they thought, or Max did not take the nearest way, for when they passed the turnstile, play had been in progress an hour. And what an hour! Cambridge, winning the toss on a plumb pitch (than a good wicket at Lord's there are none better), sent in two Interna-



"MAX MOUNTED HIM UPON HIS SHOULDERS."

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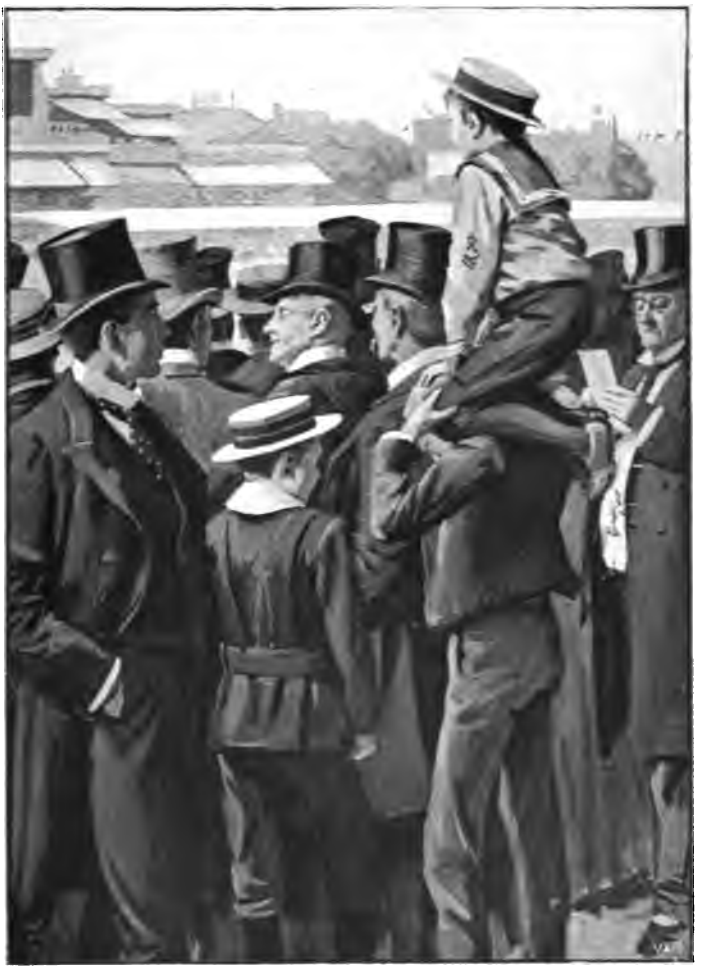

"MAX MOUNTED HIM UPON HIS SHOULDERS."

position dangerous to himself and agonizing to his supporter. At sight of the blue caps Claude's sorrows passed. The lowering future was not in the picture. He forgot that the next minute would see him down upon the hopeless gravel, and cheered Ladbrooke and Leigh, those admirable men, as if of his brother's shoulders he owned the freehold. The crowd, with the exception of one young man, were too much absorbed in the game to notice them. The exception had arisen that morning with one clear resolution—to keep away from Lord's. It was best so, best both for himself and for some one else. He had promised to join his aunt's coach-party, but since his accepting the invitation very much had happened. At breakfast his purpose faltered. As an Old Blue it was almost a duty to be present. Lord's was not so small, nor so unfrequented, that his presence there need be known. He would keep away from a certain coach, and from a certain person, and extract what pleasure from the game he could. The prospect had no great attractiveness, but in what better way

could he drag out the intolerable day? There would be the close of play to look forward to; for when the stumps were drawn night would be coming on, night that would bring (perhaps) forgetfulness and sleep. So A. K. Lawford, for the young man was that fine bat, went to Lord's, and for the first time in his life found cricket a weariness. In sheer restlessness he left his seat and took to pacing up and down behind the spectators. The sight of Claude upon Max's shoulders arrested him. He had noticed the boys before, and had smiled, rather hardly, at their unproportioned grief. But happiness has a pathetic appeal far more piognant than sorrow's. There was a light in Claude's eyes that dimmed the young man's (he was in an entirely morbid state, and that's the fact), and he anticipated with dread the inevitable moment when the bigger boy would not be able to endure the torment longer. Was it necessary, however, that the tragedy should be played? It would take but a few shillings to make all right, and in what other way, with the same expenditure, could

he buy so much joy? Of course, tact was called for. Obviously the boys were not of the class that accepts pecuniary aid.

Lawford walked across to the half-crown stand, explained matters to the gatekeeper, and slipped a half-sovereign into his hand. Then he accosted the boys. If, he said, they cared for reserved seats, he could pass them in free. He had the privilege of thus admitting his friends.

Max eyed him doubtfully. To Lawford came a flash of originality.

"The fact is, I know the gatekeeper. We went to the same school."

The Tyrells followed him and obtained, without the least bother, most excellent places. They seated themselves thus—Walter, Claude, A. K. Lawford, Max—an arrangement that had consequences; for, it coming suddenly to Max who their benefactor was, he was unable to communicate the news. He hoped that his manner would convey an inkling of the truth. He answered Lawford in respectful monosyllables, excusing himself, when

consulted, from expressing opinions of any kind; but the only result of his correctness was to throw Lawford into the arms of Claude, whose conversational confidence with the great man turned Max cold. On the "follow on" and the "leg before" questions the views of the two (most fortunately) coincided. It was when the talk got round to persons that Max would have given most for a surreptitious kick. Lawford (mercifully) was Cambridge. Had he been a Dark Blue, the consequences would have been too deplorable. How the babe chattered! and his learning, wonderful to state, equalled his volubility. Where had he acquired this erudition? His judgments, too, were often wonderfully just. Max felt that he himself could scarcely have bettered them, as, indeed, without self-contradiction, he could not have. Claude, clearly, must be a lad of more than ordinary promise. Perhaps in the past he had done his brother something less than justice. When had he listened to the youngster as Lawford was listening now? and, compared to A. K. Lawford, what

[illegible] was [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

universe new-created, where grass was green, and where white-clad heroes strutted in the sunshine superbly.

Why break himself against the door of a Paradise locked against him by an irrevocable, albeit feminine "No"? He would see the match through with these young sportsmen. The resolution was natural enough. Men in Lawford's condition will cling to any company they happen to be in, afraid of the self-discoveries they may light upon the minute they are left alone.

Max and his brothers had their heads together, discussing the propriety of inviting the great man (the secret had come out) to join them at lunch.

His sudden depression, Walter thought, showed that he had come unprovided.

"I bet he has heaps of money," said Claude.

In opposition to this, Walter urged the fact that Mr. Lawford, like themselves, had only obtained a view of the game by a gatekeeper's complaisance.

Max was skeptical, but thought the invitation,

even if it laid them open to ridicule, should be extended.

He turned as red as a new cricket-ball making the offer. Lawford accepted eagerly.

"He is hard up," reflected Walter.

"Bread pudding," said the Blue approvingly, "and cold as ice." Encouraged by this, the Tyrells told of the place bread pudding filled in their economy, and were pleased to find that Lawford applauded their resolve to keep it plain.

"A chain is a chain," he said, "even if the links be of candied peel."

Later, Max related the events of the morning.

Lawford thought he had acted rightly.

"Everything gives place to a birthday," he argued. "We will drink Claude's health in ginger-beer; it shall be my contribution."

He ran off to fetch it.

Returning with six stone bottles in his arms, he was hailed from a coach top. He looked up and became an adult again—somewhat ludicrously furnished.

"My dear Arthur, wherever have you been?"

"What on earth do you think you are doing with that ginger-beer?"

Lawford deposited his bottles inside the coach and climbed on to the roof. It was a little difficult framing a decent excuse, but he got through somehow. His aunt seemed satisfied.

"We thought you were afraid to meet Miss Manners."

Lawford started, but remembered that the lady was the only member of the party whose sympathies were Oxford.

"Gertrude was quite miserable about you," said Lawford's cousin (the one with hair down her back) mischievously. "The score was two wickets for five when we arrived, and I said, in joke, that you daren't face us after the way you had bragged. Then two more wickets went down and you didn't come. Gertrude, I am sure, thought that she had seen the last of you, and was quite relieved, in spite of her being Oxford, when Leigh helped himself to forty-seven."

Lawford made a gesture of despair.

"My poor, neglected child! Don't you know that it is twelve months since the last man 'helped himself' to runs? 'Took' forty-seven, I suppose you mean."

The cousin with hair down her back, whose one pride was her mastery of slang, appealed for support to an old young man with an eyeglass.

Lawford got a word with Miss Gertrude Manners.

"I hope you have not let concern for me spoil your morning."

Their eyes met.

"I did think of you. I was afraid you might be taking things too hardly."

"Matters are not so bad as all that," said Lawford's uncle heartily. "Cambridge have still five wickets left, and while there are lives there is hope. By the way, you have not told us what you were doing with that ginger-beer."

Lawford told the story of his morning's adventure, drawing with some humour the contrast

between the eldest and the youngest boy when he had caught sight of them—the ecstatic bliss on the face of the child on top, and the hopeless misery on that of the boy underneath.

"Bring them here," said Lawford's aunt. "I am sure they must be nice little fellows to have given you their lunch."

"I don't mind boys," said the young man with the eyeglass, "but I think other kinds of children are in the way."

The youngest Miss Lawford refuted him with a grimace so opulent in disparaging suggestion that every one roared.

"Laura, my dear!" remonstrated her mother, who had laughed with the rest.

When the Tyrells arrived they found a hearty welcome awaiting them, and a grand lunch, chicken and champagne—but everybody knows what a 'Varsity match lunch is.

Claude, who sat over by Miss Manners, related the happy circumstance that had led to their getting seats.

"A useful lot of friends you seem to have, Lawford," said the young man with the eyeglass. "Did you find another old schoolfellow in the ginger-beer man?"

"I paid for that," said the Old Blue shortly. It was easy to see that he was excessively annoyed.

It surprised Max that his new friends, so nice in other ways, should in this matter show such execrable form. Even the ladies chaffed Lawford about the lowliness of his old schoolfellow.

As for Miss Manners, her amusement was uncontrolled.

"I suppose," she said, "you wouldn't take me round, Arthur, and introduce me to your influential friend?"

"I shall be delighted," said Lawford. Certainly he looked it.

"They are going the wrong way," said Walter, when Lawford and Miss Manners had descended.

"True," said the man with the eyeglass, "but it is the way most people take sooner or later."

When the play recommenced, two seats were

still empty. The innings dragged out rather uninterestingly, closing for two hundred and three. Although the reverse of brilliant, this did not leave Cambridge without hope, as they had on the side a really great slow bowler (so great even that the fact of his being an amateur had not blinded the newspaper critics to his merit), and a hurler with moments—when these occurred he would put down the most unplayable ball in England.

The moment came when Oxford's score stood at forty for none.

The frenzy lasted four overs, and in that time the fate of the match was settled. Five wickets fell to the fast bowler (the second over saw a hat trick), and number seven was so demoralized that he incontinently ran himself out. It was just after this last catastrophe that the wanderers returned to the coach.

Lawford was wonderfully happy (as a good Cambridge man should be), but the eyes of Miss Manners (those wonderful partisan eyes of hers) were quite dim.

She took her old seat next to Claude: Lawford, though there really wasn't room, crushing in next to her on the other side.

In the small boy there beat a heart of chivalry towards a humble foe.

He slipped his hand into Miss Manners'. "Never mind; you beat us in the boat-race, you know."

Miss Manners kissed him. She was laughing now. It seemed that even such a calamity as six for fifty can be made tolerable by sympathy.

Things continued to go wrong (the whole side was out for eighty), but Miss Manners remained radiant.

Claude noticed that all the ladies kissed Miss Manners, whilst among the men it seemed to be the correct thing to wring A. K. Lawford's hand.

Oxford went in again, and at the close of play had made eighty-seven for four.

"And you really are going to walk eight miles home?" said Mrs. Lawford. "Won't you get very tired?"

Claude said "No."

It was not true, of course, but he had grown so used to this particular falsehood that it sounded true. The coach overtook the boys.

They noticed that Miss Manners, who with A. K. Lawford occupied the back seat, looked positively happy.

"Poor girl!" said Max pityingly. "She thinks because Oxford picked up a little that they will win. I suppose Lawford don't care to tell her that they haven't an earthly."

"I believe he had hold of her hand," said Walter.

Claude's utterance was more daring. "If I were not Cambridge, upon my word I would be Oxford. I like Oxford—for eyes."

Max was silent. He had an admission of error to make, and it did not come easily. Just before they reached home he told Claude that the stain of childhood that had lain on him (undeservedly lain on him recently) was removed, and that if in the future he chose to consider himself a boy, no one would be likely to object.

The Wrath of Mrs. Barker

TALL as a tower and disproportionately wide was Mrs. Barker, the charwoman. Through the small events herein chronicled the historian sees her moving like a column. Her cheeks were rough and cracked, and her arms, to the elbow. It was so all the year round, "the penalty of Adam, the season's difference" affected her no whit. She would flush into chaps at the chiding of a rude northeaster, and at the wooing of a zephyr; and her mind chapped as readily as her skin. Everything that happened roughened her and made her sore—her neighbours' streaks of good fortune (she had none herself) and their misfortunes. As the latter were the more frequent, the trait must be accounted amiable. Few women of

her class, or, indeed, of any class, have had such a gift of pity. She admitted every pathetic appeal, and this was her answer—rage. She could watch no one suffer without becoming "snappy."

When a breadwinner died, she lost her temper; and when her ten-year-old son had the mumps, her fury with him was terrible to see. Sometimes at the thought of how little she could do for George (Mrs. Barker was a widow earning an intermittent two shillings a day), she felt as if she could strike him. She never did strike him, but George, a scared, characterless child, took his mother's words at their face value, and felt them as blows. When she sympathetically stormed at him, he cowered in terror. Mrs. Barker felt that her son was, in a measure, alienated from her, and fancied that it was because she could give him nothing but necessaries, knowing that the child was yet to be born that will remain ungrateful for these. How should he guess that it was in her heart to do so much more?

There was one respect, indeed, in which she did

and brutality of his companions—seemed problems that were answerless, locks without keys. One puzzled and got no further. By contrast, a measured tramp through a page of sums was quite exhilarating. So, on this first morning of his splendour, George flung himself upon his arithmetic, not sparing a thought for his neighbours; which was a mistake, as one of them was better worth study than any sum. He was a fluffy-headed, pink-and-white boy, with a crimson button of a mouth that could straighten into colourless firmness if any will clashed with his own. His name was Roger Ford, but he was known as "Bunny," sometimes as "The Rabbit," from an enviable control he possessed over the muscles of his nose. Also he could twitch his ears. There is generally in a school one boy that serves as a nucleus for legends, and here it was "Bunny" Ford. It was whispered that he was invulnerable to pins; buried to the head in his flesh, it was said, they caused him no pain. The experiment was never tried, it being understood that Bunny (possibly on the score of tidiness) objected

"GEORGE FLUNG HIMSELF UPON HIS ARITHMETIC, NOT SPARING A THOUGHT FOR HIS NEIGHBOURS."

to pins in his legs; there is a place for everything. This consideration for his wishes recalls another legend—that of his unnatural strength. It was believed that he was a match for an adult, or at least for a woman. This belief was really the outcome of a primitive instinct that boys retain for expressing all superiority in terms that are physical. If the Rabbit had beaten boys far bigger than himself, it had been by weight of character. A fight between two Trafalgar Road boys (even between two big boys) was usually brief and inglorious. The first face-blow ended it, the recipient bursting into tears. Even the victor was appalled at the mischance, and accepted the blubbered abuse and the erratic stone (the consolations of the vanquished) with great meekness. But the Rabbit did not really begin to fight until he tasted his own blood. Beaten to a standstill in the morning, he would resume in the afternoon, and, if need be, in the evening, continuing, indeed, until he got in the blow that reduced the opposing Goliath to sobbing infancy. Among such warriors as his companions

he was a prodigy indeed. For a hero his mode of life was ideal. His manliness was not stained by the possession of a single relative. He lived in a tiny room with a chum, an orphan like himself, but some years older, who supported the two by the sale of newspapers. The babe kept house, and no one could make a shilling go so far. He was the terror of small shopkeepers, who, between being beaten down in price by the Rabbit, and being swindled by their wives (the women always weighed out just double what the child ordered), found his custom an expensive luxury. It was a glorious, Robinson-Crusoe-like existence. There was not a boy but would have renounced the whole of his relatives to share it. Bunny went hungry sometimes, but as a set-off he was never forced to eat what was merely wholesome; his clothes were ragged, but he might tear them at will. They did not consider that he had to mend them. It was this that weighed upon his mind while George was working at sums. His knickerbockers needed a large patch; but where find the piece of cloth?

And then, for the first time, his eye took in the full splendour of his neighbour. Here was an example of Fate's injustice—a boy, of no discoverable merit, clad so prodigally as to have a serge collar extending half way down his back! A fraction of the cloth that flapped there so uselessly would mend his own windowed garment perfectly. And why not? He had a knife, one of the very best and largest, and the mere ripping of the cloth would be worth all the risk. It was an accident the Rabbit regretted that in cutting the jumper he slit the cloth below. George worked on quite unconsciously; his companions told him of his loss coming out of school.

"Bunny Ford cut it out—I see 'im," said a boy who had sat behind.

George put his hand to his collar, and his finger and thumb met through the gap.

Then for a moment he went mad.

"I'll kill him! I'll kill him!" he shrieked, rushing at his despoiler.

But the Rabbit had outfaced more formidable foes.

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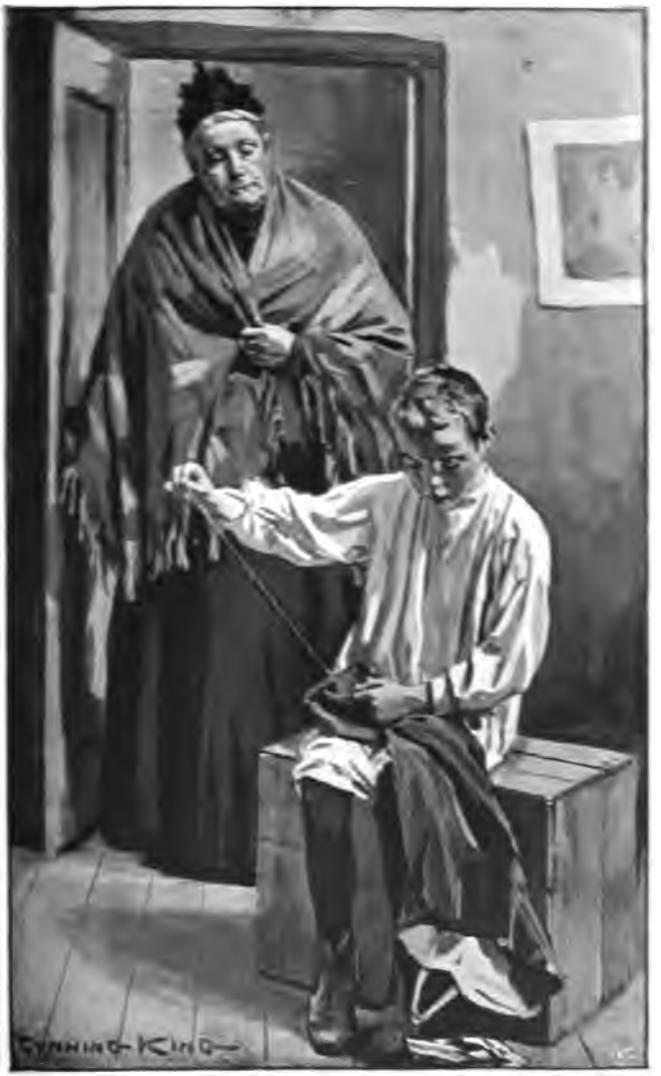
[illegible] the [illegible] Mrs. Barker did not think of that. Her eye followed the needle. She noticed that the thread itself was much too long, and that every time the worker brought the needle through the cloth he had to stretch his arm to the full, and that whenever this happened



"BUNNY FORD WAS AT WORK UPON HIS MENDING WHEN THE AVENGER NOISELESSLY ENTERED THE ROOM."

his shirtsleeve fell back, revealing a sharp little elbow. For the moment she forgot George's wrongs and her own. She was angry, furiously angry, but it was the wrath all good women feel at seeing a male doing their work. The feeling mastered her. She ran forward and snatched up the knickerbockers.

"You limb!" she shrieked, "you let me catch you sewing again!"

Then she cut the stitches and pulled out the threads. The stolen piece of cloth fell upon the floor.

Bunny Ford made no resistance, but crossed his legs upon the bed and prepared for something interesting.

Mrs. Barker eyed the piece of cloth (George's cloth) rather ruefully and proceeded to patch it into the knickerbockers. She was not a very good needlewoman, as a rule, but now, nettled by an absurd male rivalry, she did her very best, the boy, for his own future guidance, taking note of her methods.

"You mend better than me," he said simply.

It was a long job, but Mrs. Barker did not weary. She was feeling too pleased. In one detail her errand had failed (the piece of cloth was lost irrevocably), but otherwise what could be better than the turn things had taken? To the original vengeance had been added the heightening of surprise. The Rabbit played round her unsuspectingly. What a moment it would be when she threw off the mask!

And meanwhile the babe chattered and showed his treasures—some transfers taken off on the fly-leaves of school books, and a pound-of-tea presentation picture, the gift of a grocer's lady; his housekeeping did not include tea by the pound. The picture showed (in four bright colours) a beautiful girl in blue satin, at her prayers. He told Mrs. Barker that this was a picture of his mother (did any one ever hear a child tell such wicked stories?), and, laying it upon the bed, smoothed it out lovingly with dirty, dimpled hand.

At last the task was finished.

"There," said Mrs. Barker maternally (as maternal speech was understood in the neighbourhood), "you knock out that knee again, and I'll skin you! But I'll do that, anyhow."

"I like you," said the Rabbit irrelevantly. It was noticeable throughout that he paid no attention to the woman's mere words.

Mrs. Barker flushed. The time had come to start the knocking about, and it was less amusing than it had seemed further off. For one thing, she did not know how to begin. This huge red woman had never struck a child in her life.

The Rabbit standing on the bed pulled on his knickerbockers, she weakly watching him. His tiny shirt (there are two garments that are pathetic, a woman's shawl and the shirt of a small boy) and his diminutive braces contrasted with his full-grown self-reliance and caught at her heart-strings. She gave him an indignant push. Afterwards she liked to think that, uninterrupted, she would have advanced from that to something very terrible. But at this moment there was a crashing

upon the stairs, followed in a few seconds by the appearance of a red-headed Hooligan, with a murderous buckle belt. At sight of the imperturbable Rabbit he gaped in amazement.

"What's she doing here?" he asked threateningly.

"She's a brick!" said the Rabbit, patting the widow protectingly upon the back. "She's been mending my knickers."

The new comer threw his weapon into a corner and made what purposed to be a military salute.

"Did you see anything of the other woman, mum?" he asked respectfully.

"What other woman?"

"They told me one had gone up to knock the Rabbit about. That's why I run home. 'Ave you seen her?"

"No!"

"I suppose she heard you was here, and was afraid to come. Now I am home I may as well have some tea. Rabbit, look alive!"

"Three?" asked the child.

"Of course."

Mrs. Barker accepted the implied invitation. If there was to be any revenge, she must outstay this champion. Besides, it would be interesting to see how these lost males fared. The Rabbit scampered about with a will. From a cupboard he fished out half a loaf and a gallipot of dripping, two cups, and two cracked plates. These were supplemented from the cupboard of a neighbour on the next floor, the same friend allowing him to boil his kettle upon her fire.

"Three spoonsfuls," said the Hooligan resolutely. No one should say that he could not "do it" upon occasion. Mrs. Barker found herself sitting down with the boys, feeling very much as if she were somebody else. Really, the meal was very enjoyable. The tea, by the taste of it, might have been made and poured out in a Christian manner.

The Hooligan did the honours, and with something of a flourish. Directly after tea he ran off to sell his papers, but not before he had commended

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When she had finished and had dried her hands upon her dress she knew that the moment had at last come. Without stultifying herself she could not go back leaving the wrongdoer unpunished. A beating would do him good, and after all it was not essential that the operation should hurt. Even at that, however, there was a difficulty about starting in cold blood. If she could engage him in some half friendly tussle it would be possible to work up from that. She recalled how George squirmed when she washed him, and resolved to work herself

into the proper temper by forcibly scrubbing young Ford until he was as bright as a new pin. He really needed washing.

Having filled a basin with hot water, she suddenly caught hold of the Rabbit. But he came quite willingly. Like the rest of the proceedings, the move seemed novel and interesting. He had never met any one like Mrs. Barker before. It was a terrific ordeal he was subjected to, and if the charwoman had not been naturally vindictive, it would have more than satisfied her craving for revenge. Even the gentlest women reveal a strain of cruelty in dealing with dirt, confusing often the foe with his lurking-place. In hunting the enemy out of an ear or an eye, they act as if in hostile territory. The Rabbit suffered all this. In addition, his eyes smarted with hot water, and his mouth became an active volcano of soapy lava. But he did not complain. He had a notion that this was his guest's queer way of showing friendliness. Had his schoolfellows seen him, his reputation would have suffered; but their ideas on manliness

were not his. He had never had to fight against feminine ministration. He only thought it odd, well meant, and rather unpleasant.

Then Mrs. Barker did his hair. She was not rough with the tangles, but this was mere selfishness. Any woman would have enjoyed ordering such fluffy curls.

And now, unless her visit was an imposture, she must come to the chastisement.

"Do you know who I am?" she said suddenly, in a most fearful voice.

"No."

"Well, I am George Barker's mother—the boy whose coat you cut. I am the woman who has promised to thrash you within an inch of your life."

"I said I wasn't afraid of any woman," said the Rabbit quietly.

Mrs. Barker glared at him, but he steadily looked her down. Her eyes fell before his. It was as George had foretold. She had met more than her match. It made it worse that his ascendency

was not a physical one. To be outfaced by a babe and sent about her business! Very abashed was Mrs. Barker as she turned round and walked away. She was pleased that the Rabbit came after her, to explain that he had not meant to spoil the suit, but that did not restore her pride. It was so obvious that the apology had not been prompted by fear, and yet shame was not the sole emotion. There was an odd sort of joy, too. There had been more in the Rabbit's face than mere defiance. There had been comprehension. He had understood, as George would never have understood, why it was impossible for her to raise her hand. A child's mind is a clear pool, and on its margin there is generally a woman peering into the waters for a softened reflection of herself; but the surface is easily troubled. George's mind ruffled at a breath, and in the ripples his mother saw her features distorted out of humanity. But from the orphan's clear depths it was a good woman that had smiled back at her. Despite the ignominy of her return, the expedition was scarcely regretted.

When Mrs. Barker got back to Salisbury Buildings, she found the doorway thronged by gossiping neighbours. She tried to pass through with a short "Good evening," but the talkers knew of her mission, and chorused for information. It was the very situation she had been dreading. However, by selecting for answer only the most convenient questions, she came through the ordeal triumphantly. Her reputation for hardness was even increased. You must picture her standing under the fanlight, her huge red arms crossed, and her face some six inches above the others, which are pushed upwards towards her.

"Law! Mrs. Barker, what a time you've bin! Whatever have you bin doing to him?"

"His friend was there, and I had to wait until he left."

"And then you torked to the young master?"

Mrs. Barker caught at the equivocation.

"Yes," she said grimly "I torked to him. You can say that I torked to him."

"She combed 'is hair for 'im, I'll be bound," said a lover of justice gleefully.

"Yes, I combed his hair for him. When I had finished," she added, with a flash of humour, "you wouldn't have known him."

A soft-hearted auditor edged away, but the others were eager for detail.

"You made him smart?"

"Yes, I made him smart; and, what is more," she said, her voice rising to an excited shriek, "I ain't done with him! Before he's a week older I shall go round and make him smart again."

Then she pushed her way through. She devoted what was left of the evening to mending the serge jumper with a piece of inconspicuous tweed. George, still awed by the morning's tragedy, moved about quietly. Mrs. Barker had it in her mind to say something gentle and reassuring, but, not finding the words, contented herself instead with kissing him when he was asleep.

A Wager of Battle

MAX TYRELL was a disciplinarian, and, as such, a discourager of childhood; but he was thorough, and when he admitted his youngest brother to his friendship (friendship is a strong term to use, but no other will serve), he did so without reservations. In his place most elders would have consorted with the youngster when the brothers were alone, but would have expected him to drop behind when they were joined by boys of standing. It was not in reason, however, to expect older boys to receive Claude in his brother's absence. It happened, therefore, that when Max and Walter went away to spend a week of their summer holidays upon a farm, Claude found himself more desolate than he had been in his life. The Tyrells had moved to West Hampstead late in July (their new home not having been quite

ready for them at quarter day) or Claude would have had friends in abundance. There is nothing of stand-offishness among the Merthyr Road juveniles. If it had not been for the Parliament Hill Fields, and the cricket to be watched there, he would have died of weariness.

It is a strange thing (and economists can throw no light upon it) that, during the summer months, whatever time of the day or week you visit a public space, there will be respectable men practising cricket. They are not of the leisured classes, nor does their contentment sort with the theory of their being out of work. And theirs is no brief hour snatched from toil. They play for the whole day —perhaps for much longer periods. When a ball is hit into the outfield, they trudge after it, as if saving themselves for the later stages of a game that will last until the weather breaks. Claude used to go down in the morning and watch these contests. The clumsy evolutions amused him, and fed his self-importance. Arriving at the fields one brilliant morning, with enough bread-pudding in

his pocket to support him until tea-time, he found that there was in progress a most indisputable match. There were creases, brown pads (one for each batsman), and umpires laden with black coats. Enterprise had even gone so far as a form for the scorers. Claude threw himself down upon the grass in a corner remote from the other onlookers. Soon, however, his solitude was disturbed by a band of little ragamuffins, who, becoming interested in the match, applauded generously, but with little discrimination. Particularly did they cheer one player, a stout, pursy man, for no better reason (apparently) than that he was making all the runs. His methods were blind and circular, and every run that he notched was a separate and unpardonable sin. Now Claude, since his visit to Lord's, was by way of being a purist, and it pained him that any one should score runs in that way, and that others should be so lost to right feeling as to encourage him in so doing.

"Well plied, sir-ir," screamed the ragamuffins, dwelling lovingly upon the title. (It was only

upon the cricket-field that they permitted themselves to use it.)

"Oh! well scraped!" trebled Claude.

Hero worship is ever resentful of criticism, and the result of Claude's efforts to create a higher standard of taste was to bring the cads about him in an angry circle. He thought it time to stand up.

"You think a fat lot of yourself!" said a child of Claude's own age, who was removed from his companions, socially, by the gulf that divides patches from rags. He seemed cleaner, too, but, in part at least, this was due to his brighter colour. Claude recognized the note of assault, and unostentatiously made himself ready.

"Dot him, Rabbit!" cried the expectant ring.

The boy addressed as the Rabbit edged towards Claude, fixing him with the white of his eye. Upon some victims the manœuvre has a paralyzing effect, entirely robbing them of the power of self-defence. Claude met it with the proper counter.

"Don't crowd me!" he said, flinging the Rabbit

back. "Won't you let me find some one to back me up?" he added, expecting little from the appeal.

"We'll see fair play all right," said the ring impatiently.

"You look it," said Claude contemptuously.

"Call us cheats?" shrieked the ragamuffins, preparing to resent the imputation on their chivalry by falling upon Claude *en masse*.

Then to the Rabbit there came a noble idea.

"Come along, Cocky," he cried to Claude; "let's get somewhere and fight by ourselves."

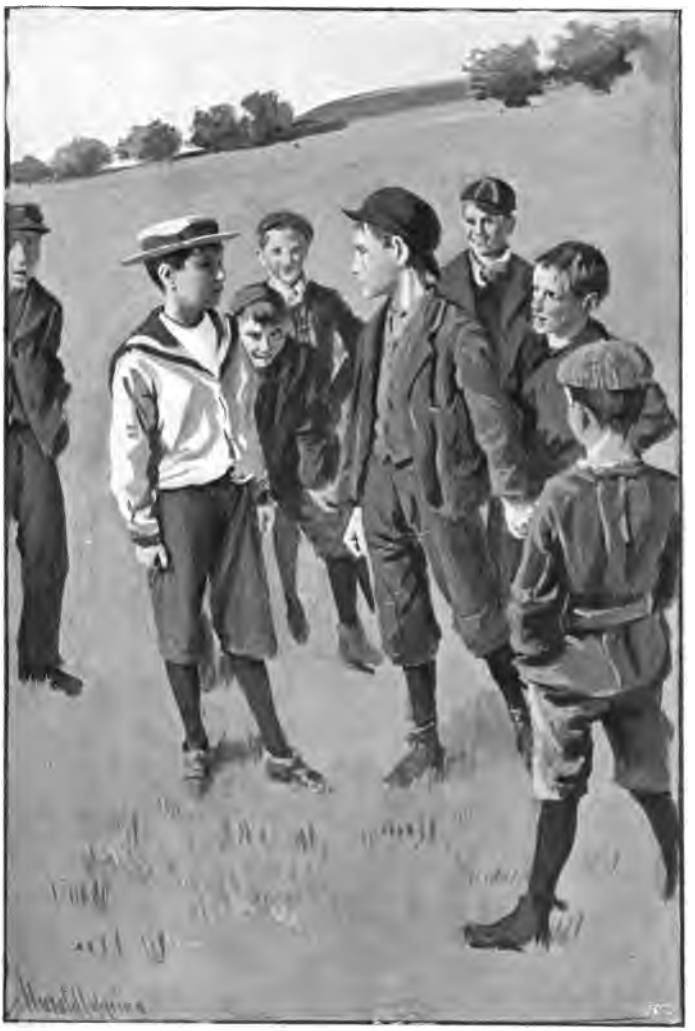
He shouldered his small jacket and pushed his way through the crowd, Claude following. They wandered up and down with the ragged children at their heels, until Claude despaired of shaking them off.

"Can you run?" asked the Rabbit suddenly.

"Faster than you."

"Then run now."

It was a second before the would-be spectators understood what had happened. Then with cries of indignation they started in pursuit, but from the



"THE BOY ADDRESSED AS THE 'RABBIT' EDGED TOWARDS CLAUDE, FIXING HIM WITH THE WHITE OF HIS EYE."

very first the chase was hopeless. One runner could have caught up, but his zeal for pugilism was that of an onlooker, and he thought it safer to keep with the crowd.

"Done those kids," said the Rabbit, when he and Claude stopped for breath.

"Beastly little cads!" said Claude.

"They're not our class," said the Rabbit. "We can have a much better fight by ourselves. Do you know how I come to think of running away from them?"

"No!"

"We learnt a bit at school about Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James. Fitz is all surrounded by Roderick's men wanting to kill him, but old Rod sent 'em all home and then fought Fitz-James on his own. It come back to me when they was all going to set on to you."

"Come on!" said Claude; "let's get across and fight in the gorse. It will be the very thing."

Not a word was spoken as they marched in Indian file—the chief leading—up the Vale of

Health, and by the sounding shore of the Leg of Mutton pond. Here there were a half-dozen of Claude's schoolfellows sailing a boat. They did not notice him. Claude pointed them out to his enemy, who could have wept for joy, the episode was so perfect.

"I suppose you couldn't say that bit where Fitz-James, after they have walked on, won't set his gang on to Rod!"

"No," said Claude; "I know all about it, but I never learned any."

"I could say it myself," said the Rabbit, "but that wouldn't be right. You call me 'proud chief,' you know. It would be ripping if you could say it, but it's good enough any way."

They found a secluded dingle, and took off their coats.

"If we were children," said Claude, "we should get bits of sticks for swords, and go through that fight in the book."

The Rabbit thought that would spoil everything.

"It was because our fight was all real, and I

wouldn't set my gang on you, and you wouldn't set your gang on me, that it was so grand. It wasn't kids' play. We really are like old Rod and Fitz. Even if I get beat, I shall be glad we met."

"Have you ever given in?" asked Claude, with whom the fear of some day having to own himself vanquished was a waking nightmare. He had fought twice, and both times successfully.

"Never! I would just go on and on, even if my teeth was all knocked out, and I couldn't see. They can't make you give 'em best, if you won't."

"Why, that is true," said Claude, his mind relieved of a load. "I'll never give in, either."

"What a fight it will be!" said the Rabbit.

"Need we fight now?" said Claude. "Can't we have a good time first? I have enough 'toke' for the two of us. We could have a grand day, and fight before we go home."

"Well, I don't mind. Let's start on the grub now."

The bread pudding was produced, and apportioned on the traditional system—and the wit of

man will devise nothing more perfect—of one having the division, and the other the choice. As they ate, they lay back and talked. Claude told about the Oxford and Cambridge match, and about the school society he was admitted to now. His companion, not to be outdone, spoke of big boys he had fought, boys fiercer than wolves—and of armies that he had himself organized and led.

"Like the beastly kids you had with you to-day?"

"No, better than those. Twenty million times better."

"I don't believe it. That was the army you have been stuffing about."

"Well, we won't quarrel. Look here! I can show you something."

The something was so wonderful as to remove from Claude's mind the suspicion that his companion was a less remarkable boy than he represented himself to be. He possessed a singular control over the muscles of his nose, being able to move

that organ to an extent that was positively fascinating.

"That's why I'm called the 'Rabbit.' My real name is Roger Ford, and now look at my ears."

Claude looked closely. It was certain that they moved.

"Can you do anything?"

"What a place this would be for playing Boers!" said Claude, changing the subject. To tell the truth, in the presence of this gifted lad he was feeling a little ashamed of his incapacity. "You could defend this hill, and I would start right over there and creep round until I took it."

"What would I be doing?"

"Oh! you would be throwing clay, and if I showed so much as a head above the skyline, you would hit it."

"Don't believe I would. What! throw clay right over there?"

"With a 'bendy' stick you could. Why, I can throw a hundred times further."

"Let's see you!"

Claude found a supple twig, and then dug up—he had to go as far as the pond for it—a supply of wet clay.

He fastened at the end of his twig a morsel, and then—but who, at some time or other, has not learned to throw clay?

The Rabbit was astounded at such artillery. One shot dropped behind a hillock quite a hundred yards off.

"If you had been lying there where it fell," said Claude, "you would have been killed, without my having seen you."

"Cæsar! Let's begin at once."

"You don't know how to shoot yet."

But the Rabbit proved an apt pupil, and in a few minutes things were ripe for battle. To make sure of ammunition, Claude filled his pockets.

"It will brush out," he said. "Now I will go right over there and hide."

"Wait a moment," said his opponent. "If I don't see you, how shall I know where to shoot?"

"You'll have to judge the direction of my shots."

"Jerusalem! that's something like."

It was only a hundred yards Claude had to advance, but so terrible was the Rabbit's fusilade, that nearly an hour had passed before he came to the final rush. By a miracle of good fortune he had escaped unhit. At the foot of the hill the Rabbit met him with a face so sternly set that Claude, who had no mind to confuse play and reality, called a truce.

"You would never have got up that hill. I would have died first."

"It's been a good game."

"Rather! It's better than playing with toy soldiers, little silly twopenny lead things. I've looked at 'em often in shops—six in a shilling box."

"I've got hundreds," said Claude—"Highlanders, and Lancers, and Bengals, and Australians, and C.I.V.'s."

"Well, I don't want them. I think they are kiddish."

"They're not. You would like them if you had them."

"I wouldn't. I shouldn't know what to do wiv 'em."

"I'd just like you to see them, all arranged out in regiments."

"Well, I don't mind seeing them, as you've got them. You said you had Lancers?"

"We will have our fight, and then you can come along."

"Not much I don't. After smashing you, I'm not going among your crowd. They'd kill me."

"How about Roderick Dhu?"

"That's different. They hadn't fought then. After old Rod had been drowned, his gang wouldn't have let Fitz off. Not likely."

"Well, come along now, anyhow. Bother the fight! I had forgotten all about it."

"But how about the coward's blow? You pushed me, which was the same thing. You can't take it back. No one can take back a coward's blow. If I don't fight, it makes me a coward."

"Well, I tell you what—I will throw down a glove, and you shall pick it up."

For a wonder Claude had his gloves with him.

"All right. And what now?"

"You'll just wear it in your hat."

"I'm blowed if I will!"

"You have to—that's part of it. Wearing it in your hat shows that you don't funk me. It's doing my dags to touch you."

"Well, then, it makes you a coward?"

"No, it doesn't. I bide my time; they never think any the worse of a man for biding his time. Then one day I come up to you and say, 'I will trouble you for that glove,' and then we begin to fight."

"Now, that's sense. Here, help me to fix it."

The Rabbit's hat (some three sizes too large) was a ribbonless bowler. To attach a kid glove to it without pins was no easy matter. As a temporary matter, the boys contented themselves with tucking it under the brim.

"You wait out here," said Claude, when they

reached his house, "and I will go in and see if the coast is clear."

He returned in a few minutes, looking very embarrassed.

"The Mater is out," he said, "and every one. We could have played a treat, only——"

"Well?"

"I promised to sit with my sister when I got back, and she's been asking for me."

The Rabbit did not complain.

"I don't only sit with her," said honest Claude, with an effort, "I play with her. She lies on her back all day, and will never get up. You would play with her if you were me."

"I dare say."

The Rabbit's complacence was wonderful.

"What do you play—dolls?"

"Sometimes."

Claude's face was crimson, but he scorned to apologize.

"All right. I'll go up and show her how to play dolls. I bet she don't know."

Claude caught at the suggestion. He had been feeling troubled about sending his invited guest away.

"Very well, but I must go upstairs first and tell her."

The invalid raised no objections, and Claude succeeded in getting his friend up to the bedroom unseen by the servants. The Rabbit found a dark little girl (he had pictured her fair, having a notion that all invalids are incurably blonde) lying under a shawl, on a square roomy couch. The bed was against the opposite wall. She was prettier than he had thought girls were, and he was impressed, but not to the extent of being made conscious of his patched boots.

"Good afternoon, Roderick Dhu," she said pleasantly.

"You know that piece, too? I'll say my part, if you like."

"You said you were going to teach my sister how to play with dolls," said Claude grimly.

"Have you ever played with dolls, Roderick Dhu?"

"No; but I reckon I can all right. Fish 'em out, Claude."

The whole collection were laid upon the couch, and their histories told.

"All right," said the Rabbit. "I know all about them. Now you listen to me."

It was a wonderful game that followed. It seemed almost as if the dolls had come to life, and were playing amongst themselves, so spontaneous were the Rabbit's inventions, and so able was he to keep all the puppets, as it were, moving at once. Claude watched his sister's flushed face, and a feeling of anger crept into his heart. She had never looked like that playing with him. He had devoted much of his playtime to the invalid quite ungrudgingly, but believing, nevertheless, that his action was of the nature of self-denial. Now that another (although only for an hour) had taken his place, he realized that his sister had given more

than she had taken. His experience is the universal tragi-comedy of brothers.

Perhaps Margaret guessed what was in his mind.

"Come here, Claudie," she said, "and let us talk. I've had enough of dolls. Tell us about your school."

Claude told of hairbreadth escapes—of masters outwitted—of memorable games. He described also his two fights, not realistically, for the little girl's fingers had tightened on his palm.

"Now let us hear Roderick Dhu."

The Rabbit's recollections took a different turn. He spoke of the girl-mother who had died when he was five. He remembered her as sewing all day and all night, but breaking off sometimes to play such games as no one had ever seen. A ten-year-old boy from the next floor, looking in to scoff, had become entangled to such an extent that he had become almost as one of the family. The Rabbit was living with this boy now.

"My share of what he spends is only lent. I shall pay him back when I am older and we go to America."

He spoke of the locality he was going to, which seemed to be the sort of place that Claude had fancied existed only in books, and not books he was allowed to read at that.

"I shall go into an office," said Claude disconsolately.

"You see, Claudie has promised that I shall live with him, and I should be no good on a prairie," said the little girl.

"Oh! we will look after you all right!"

"Who is '*we*'?" asked the brother sharply.

"Tell us about to-day," said Margaret hastily. "Claude has only told me a teeny bit."

In the visitor's hands the day's adventures made a wonderfully interesting story (much of it seemed fresh even to Claude), but the episode of the glove he suppressed entirely.

"Thank you. Oh! I am glad that you and Claude didn't fight, after all. When Claude came

home once with a black eye and his lip all torn, I cried all night."

"She is a girl," said Claude, feeling that the excuse was inadequate.

"You see, Claudie and I are almost 'spoons' on each other. If I was well, we should go about together always, and always play together."

Claude signalled the other boy to reserve his expression of disgusted indignation until they were alone; but the Rabbit did not seem to think there was anything wrong. Never was such a forgiving beast. Possibly, however, his quiescence was because he had not been attending. For some minutes he had been quite absent, as if lost in his own affairs. He sat now for some little time without noticing that no one was speaking. Then he rose abruptly.

"I must be going now," he said. "I've enjoyed myself fine. Good-bye, miss. I wish you was quite well."

"Good-bye, Roderick Dhu."

The visitor took his hat and stood fumbling with it, his back to the couch.

"I've got a little present, miss, if you would take it—something that—that——"

Without finishing his speech, he handed her Claude's kid glove.

"Thank you; but that is a boy's glove; and, besides, I don't go out. I have no use for it really."

"No more have I—now," he said truthfully, and hurried from the room.

"What does it mean?" asked Claude at the street door.

"It means," said the Rabbit stoutly, "that I am not going to fight."

"But you have taken a coward's blow."

"It's a lie! I never—a push is nothing."

"But you said yourself——"

"I don't care. You can call it what you like. If you want to fight, you can fight your sister—she has your glove. You could hurt her."

Very bitter and scornful was the poor Rabbit as

he turned away. It was a long walk home (four miles at the least), but he did not hurry. His mind was a whirl of conflicting thoughts. He thought of Claude and of the dark little girl (many times of the girl), of the play in the gorse, of the army, and of the coward's blow. 'Would his followers forgive him for deserting them, and how would they take it when they heard that there had been no fight? An hour or two previously he had looked forward to their scornful greeting, and to the revulsion that would follow when they understood the significance of the kid glove in his hat.

In the meantime the army, after wandering about the Heath and getting chased by a keeper, had returned to the neighbourhood of King's Cross, and were waiting for their captain. As the hours passed and he did not return, they began to discuss what could have happened. That the Rabbit had been beaten they could not believe. The weight of opinion was that in Claude he had found an opponent stronger than himself—that it was a long fight, and that he would beat the toff (as he

had beaten big Johnson) by sheer indifference to punishment.

When they saw the Rabbit returning embarrassed, and with none of the signs of battle upon him, they raised a shout, at the recollection of which his ears tingle to this day.

Interchangeable Parts

WHEN Mr. Tyrell heard of the friendship that had sprung up between his nine-year-old son and a common boy, he, like a good middle-class parent, forbade it sternly.

"Why?" said Claude. "He is a very nice boy."

"Nice boy! A child from the gutter!"

"He isn't truly. He lives at the very top of a house."

"Your mother has seen him; she says he is quite ragged."

"Well, he isn't!" (the small boy spoke vehemently—almost rudely). "He mends his own clothes, but he isn't ragged. Whenever there is a hole that shows, he sews it up at once."

"I am surprised at you, when you have a nice home, wanting such a companion; and as to bring-

ing him into this house—which I hear you did—it is a wonder we were not robbed."

"Bunny Ford is not a thief, and he isn't a cad, either. Some boys would call him a cad, but he isn't; he is chivalrous. Mayn't I go to tea with him on Saturday?"

"Absurd; you will be asking him here to tea next. You must tell him at once that you are to have nothing more to do with him."

"What can I say?"

"Anything. Goodness me! it is easy enough. He must find some boys in his own class to play with."

"I can't without hurting his feelings."

Mr. Tyrell laughed derisively; and, indeed, the notion of a boy who does his own mending, and lives in a garret having feelings is sufficiently ridiculous.

Claude went out into the garden and mused. It was a bright afternoon, and he was very miserable. The sun streamed down gaily upon the flower-beds, as if no friendship had just been murdered. And

Claude had to piece together a verbal garment wherein to bury it—a garment that should hide the scars and make it appear that the poor slain friendship had died naturally. He made little progress, but from his cogitations one conclusion emerged —that it was as impossible to defy his father as to obey him literally. Claude had lent the Rabbit a really fine collection of lead soldiers, the arrangement being that Claude should call for them on the Saturday afternoon, and stop to tea. This would have been explained but for Mr. Tyrell's innuendo about the Rabbit's honesty. As it was, the youngster feared a fresh outburst should his father hear of this crowning imprudence.

Claude, even now, did not consider it imprudence. In spite of what had been said, he did not believe the Rabbit to be a thief—so loth are children to take their opinions about friends from wiser grown-up people who have not seen them.

He would not stop to tea, but would explain the situation, bring away his treasures, and be back before his father returned from town.

Unfortunately for the small boy, Mr. Tyrell returned very early on that particular Saturday, and caught a glimpse of him in an up train. Suspecting Claude's errand, he took a ticket to King's Cross, and followed his son—a quarter of an hour behind. He knew where to go—indeed, it was his seeing an envelope with a weird address in Claude's handwriting that had first opened his eyes.

When Claude reached his friend's abode he found the garret door locked.

"He always locks the door when he goes out, and takes the key," said a woman on the floor below. "He is that old-fashioned you never saw. I expect he will be back soon."

"All right," said Claude cheerfully, and to pass the time he went for a short walk.

While Mr. Tyrell is approaching from the Trafalgar Road there is time for a word about Roger Ford's very remarkable gift. He had a wholly unaccountable power over adults. Men and women are commonly considered grown-up children, but that is not quite correct, for the child

is still there, just as it was twenty, forty, or sixty years ago—there, but asleep. Now and again, at rare intervals, the slumber is broken. The Rabbit had this strange faculty—he would call, and the forgotten child must answer. To him every adult was a possible playfellow. He would lure respectable tradesmen from their carts to play cricket with him against lamp-posts, and by chalking geometrical figures upon the pavement, could draw purple-faced matrons into them, and set them jigging up and down, kicking little stones. "I wonder 'ow I come to do that?" they would say, when they paused, gasping and out of breath. "I haven't played 'hop-scotch' since I was a slip of a gel."

And now Mr. Tyrell was to fall. He was nearing his destination—had turned from the Trafalgar road into Lytton Street (from which Berger Court branches) when he met a small, bareheaded boy, kicking an empty condensed-milk tin, with so admirable a burlesque of a tricky Association forward that Mr. Tyrell laughed aloud. The child did not kick and run only, but combined these

motions with a dance step that seemed the very rhythm of dancing blood. Mr. Tyrell as he watched became entangled. His toes tingled. As the player passed, the man shot out his left foot and deprived him of the tin.

"There is nothing to grin about," said the child (Mr. Tyrell was smiling with elation); "I could take it away from you."

Claude's father looked at the empty tin longingly, and then kicked it tentatively. The child charged him, and was repulsed. "Really," said Mr. Tyrell to himself, "I am playing remarkably well."

He walked some twenty yards, keeping the improvised football just in front of him, and repelling all attempts to dispossess him. Approaching a lamp-post, he took a flying shot, and scored a goal.

"I could whack you at other games," said the street child.

"What are they?"

"In the room where I live there are splendid games. I'll show you."

He danced along, Mr. Tyrell following, his feet unconsciously adapting themselves to the child's hop and skip. When the boy entered a house, the man paused at the door, wondering what the parents would say (as a child Mr. Tyrell had always been shy with adults); but his conductor looked back over the banisters with a finger crooked so cunningly that follow he must. At the top of the house the guide unlocked a door, and ushered him into a garret. In the corner was a deal table covered with lead soldiers.

"They don't fight like that," said Mr. Tyrell. "Why don't you extend them in open order on the floor, or put them into a fort?"

"I have bricks," said the Rabbit, displaying a large box that his school teacher had lent him.

"Good!" said Mr. Tyrell. "Give me half the bricks and half the soldiers, and I will lick you as I did at football. Have you pea-shooters and peas?"

"Rather."

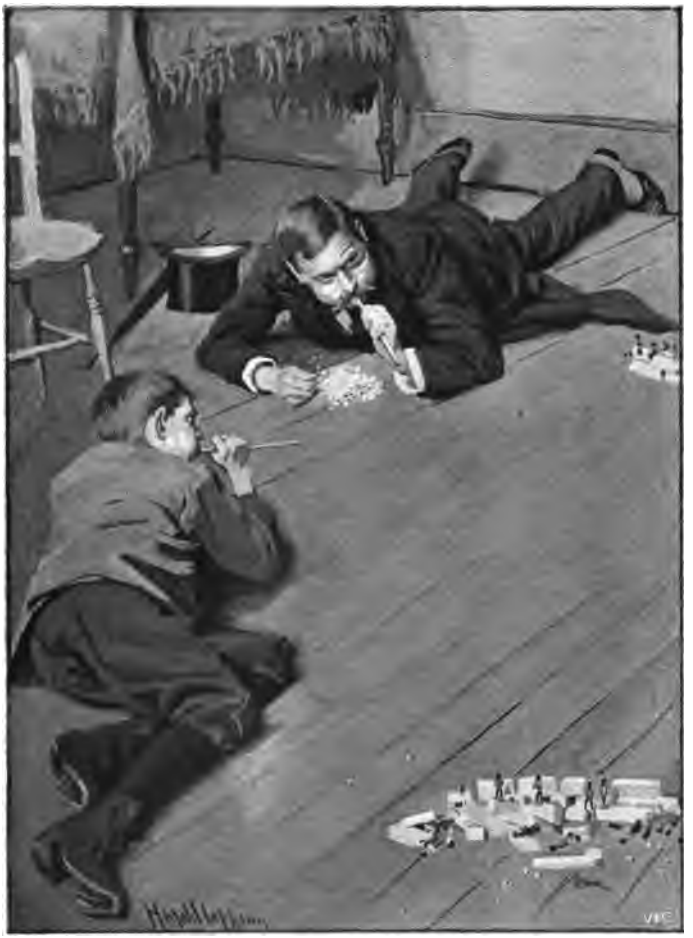
Having built and manned their forts, the oppo-

nents took up positions to the right and left of them respectively, so that they could shoot diagonally without fear of hitting one another. Mr. Tyrell's sprawl upon the floor was a recollection of the days when he had shot at Wimbledon.

In the battle that ensued, the methods of the combatants were widely dissimilar. The Rabbit, who kept his mouth full of peas, relied upon rapidity of fire, his antagonist trusting in high muzzle velocity, and a low trajectory. His lung power was great, even for a man, and he exercised it to the full, his neck and forehead becoming like those of a conscientious cornet player obliging with "The Lost Chord". Beneath his bombardment walls bulged, and parapets went crashing down upon the soldiers behind them. A glorious sense of power came to Mr. Tyrell. Nothing, he felt, could live under his pitiless cannonade. The moment came when he could claim a victory.

"You haven't won! You haven't won!" shrieked the Rabbit. "Mine are not all dead."

He pointed to one (a corpse obviously) at an



"MR. TYRELL'S SPRAWL UPON THE FLOOR WAS A RECOLLECTION OF THE DAYS WHEN HE HAD SHOT AT WIMBLEDON."

angle of forty degrees, whose bayonet, wedged between bricks, prevented his falling to the ground.

Mr. Tyrell vainly argued the point, but in the end lay down again sulkily, and resumed firing. It was in vain. Protected by a heap of *débris,* the corpse would defy him indefinitely, and while he was wasting ammunition a lucky shot by the Rabbit laid low a whole company. Considering that the war was really over, this was virtually murder.

Mr. Tyrell sprang to his feet.

"That man of yours has been dead ever so long. I will not go on with such foolishness."

"Then I win," said Roger Ford.

"How can you say such a thing. You are trying to best me."

"It's you that are cheating!"

They were still wrangling when the door opened and Claude strode into the room. Coming upstairs, and hearing his father's angry voice, he had fancied that his disobedience was being visited upon Roger; but a pause upon the threshold—a pardonable hesitation in the circumstances—enlightened

him. His father—whom he worshipped rather than loved—was playing and quarrelling upon equal terms with a child from the streets—a mere ragamuffin!

"Thank you, I will take my soldiers," he said, speaking in the most icy and adult tone (in jealousy there is only one age), and kneeling down began to pack them swiftly into their box.

The two late antagonists looked on, nervous and embarrassed.

"That was my father you were playing with!"

"Don't you like my playing with him?" said the Rabbit.

"No, I don't!"

"Why not?"

Mr. Tyrell was standing behind Roger Ford, and over the latter's head he made piteous appeals to his son not to answer. He was still so far back in his childhood that it seemed a dreadful thing the susceptibility of his little playmate should be wounded.

Claude ignored these appeals pointedly. He addressed the Rabbit—

"Can't you find some friends of your own class to play with?"

The Rabbit stood for a second with his mouth open, the stab was so unexpected, and then flushed painfully.

"Perhaps you don't think me good enough to play with your father?"

"You are not."

Mr. Tyrell had never felt so ashamed of a son in his life. He drew the Rabbit into a corner—

"Don't mind, don't mind," he whispered. "It is I that have offended him."

"Is he cross with you for playing in the streets?"

"So you were playing before you came in here," said Claude. "Did you know who you both were?"

It was an awkward question—awkwardly put, and very awkward to answer—for the man, at any rate.

But it was a tradition in the Tyrell family to

speak the truth—even with the adults—and Claude's father confessed everything.

"I have a real football at home. You need not have kicked a condensed-milk tin."

Then he began counting his soldiers.

"Perhaps," said the Rabbit bitterly, "you think I would steal things."

"No!" shouted Mr. Tyrell, afraid of what Claude might say. "No one could possibly think such a thing."

Really there was a point beyond which he would not have his playfellow insulted.

Claude put the box of soldiers under his arm and, without another word, marched out of the room, his father following.

"Come, Claude," said Mr. Tyrell, as they walked along the Trafalgar Road, "perhaps it is natural for you to resent my picking up with street children, but I saw little Ford playing and had to join in."

"You never wanted to play with me."

"I have played with you scores of times." And

so, in a sort, Mr. Tyrell had, surrendering every point with an effortless self-abnegation that made games intolerable.

"You never quarrelled with me."

Mr. Tyrell affected to laugh, but he understood perfectly. He had never played with Claude in the same sense in which he had with this stranger.

"Anyhow," he said lamely, "you might have broken it off in some other way. Roger was not to blame, and you have as good as told him that we despise him."

"I am sorry," said Claude.

His anger was melting, and he was fast becoming juvenile again. At this precise moment, in the matter of sensitiveness, he was scarcely a year older than his father.

"When I saw you playing like that with him, I was mad, but I am sorry now about his feelings."

"Can't we go back," said Mr. Tyrell, "and make it up?"

"I will go," said Claude. "I will go by myself."

"Good-bye, then. But, Claude, would you mind my asking him up one night to tea?"

"I will ask him for Tuesday."

It was not until some hours afterwards that it struck Mr. Tyrell that on Tuesday he would be out of town, and that Claude knew it. On the whole, however, the arrangement pleased him. He was back now in middle age, and nothing, he thought, was so boring and embarrassing as the visits of Claude's little friends.

A Token of Esteem

WHEN Roger Ford was invited to tea at the Tyrells', they all resolved to be very kind to him; but within five minutes of his arrival, with one exception, they had forgotten this completely and were treating him as one of themselves. At the tea-table he was allowed an equal share of the conversation, but no more. Each of the Tyrell boys (as their wont was) talked the whole time, and their visitor was at liberty to do the same. On these terms, as on any other, the Rabbit was quite equal to holding his own. But perhaps he was favoured in the direction of the conversation. Max, for example, made himself hoarse trying to catch the visitor's ear. He recalled episodes of his youth, describing himself as he was at young Ford's age, without a trace of self-patronage. Walter and Claude, who caught snatches of their elder brother's vociferous confidences, were aghast

at his condescension. If the visitor had not been entirely absorbed in what he himself was saying, he would have been greatly interested. Mrs. Tyrell alone maintained the altruistic attitude. Her idea of the lower classes was that they were people to be given things to. After tea she marched Roger Ford up to her bedroom, and gave him a parcel of collars and socks, and also a still presentable sailor suit of Claude's.

"You won't want the things you are wearing, again," she said, "so you can make the change at once."

Mrs. Tyrell left the visitor to himself for a quarter of an hour; and when she returned the change had been effected. To her own surprise, as much as to the child's, she stooped down and kissed him. Now that he was dressed like one of her own sons, she no longer saw in her protégé a representative of a class, but a little boy with no mother to scold him and fight his battles.

"Now," said the Rabbit, "I must go and show myself in these togs to the little miss."

"Do," said Mrs. Tyrell. "I am sure she will be very glad to see you."

The invalid, who, like her brothers, had been won by the small boy's manliness and self-reliance, welcomed him very heartily. Claude was in the room, and Roger, as though to challenge comparison, went over and stood beside him.

"I am bigger than young Claude," he remarked complacently, "and we are the same age."

"We are not," said Claude hotly. "I have only just had my birthday, and yours was last January."

"My birthday is in seventeen days exactly," said Margaret. "It seems silly to count the days, because I have already had my present from papa and mamma."

"She will have heaps more," said Claude. "That girl gets hundreds."

"Who gives them to her?" asked the Rabbit suspiciously.

"Oh! we all do—Max, and Walter, and I, and the servants, and all our friends."

"Does she get any from boys?"

"A few. There is a fellow next door who gives her something every birthday. This was from him. It's a real ivory penholder, and if you look through that speck of glass in the middle you can see Eastbourne pier."

"I don't believe it is ivory."

"It is. Now you just take a look. Isn't it ripping? No one would think you could see a pier, and boats, and sands, and things through a mite of glass."

The Rabbit took a long look and then returned it.

"When you are writing," he said, "you don't want views of the seaside; and if you did, you couldn't see it. The picture ought to have been let in at the top."

"You are not meant to look when you are writing."

"And other people couldn't see, either. Where are they to be sitting?"

"Silly kid! The view is not to be looked at when any one is writing. When you want to write,

there is the pen; and when you don't, there is the picture."

"Then why didn't he give her two things, a pen *and* a view? I expect he was too blooming mean!"

"I took that pen to school one day," said Claude, "and used it in the writing lesson. You don't know how jolly it is to be doing your copy-book, and in between, when you get tired of writing, hold the pen up to the light and see all those boats."

"And have the ink run down into your eye! No, thank you. If I couldn't give a girl a better present than that, I wouldn't give her one at all."

"I bet you never gave one as good."

The Rabbit was very indignant at this, and it was not until a couple of hours afterwards, when he was well on his way home, that he realized its truth. He had never given a good present, and how should he? Nevertheless, young Claude had no right to say it. "If only I could find a sovereign lying on the pavement, I'd show him." And almost as he said this he saw a gold coin. It was only a half-sovereign, and it was lying in the gutter,

but the coincidence was remarkable, although less so than if the finder had been any one else. Finding sovereigns upon the pavement was his favourite daydream—indeed, most of his imaginations started with this. If he was ever to find money, it was likely that the discovery would come when his thoughts were busy picturing it.

Upon arriving home, Roger Ford sewed up the half-sovereign in his waistcoat; and when he went to bed, he wore this garment next to his skin.

Bill, who was spending a very pleasant evening with a friend leaning up against a post, found it hard to tear himself away, and did not stumble up the crazy staircase until after midnight.

Roger, when he awoke, had his plan of action cut and dried. In sixteen days was Margaret's birthday, and in eight the summer holidays came to an end. The period, therefore, seemed to divide itself naturally into two equal parts—eight days for the joys of shopping, and eight days for those of gloating over the article purchased. Devoting the whole sum to a present for Margaret Tyrell

was not one of the points he had deliberated. It was as a gift to her that he had seen the coin in the first instance.

Roger started off as soon as he had given Bill his breakfast. The next seven days he meant to spend visiting shops that could not possibly supply what he wanted. He saw himself telling pompous shopkeepers and their prim wives that they had nothing good enough, with a keen anticipatory enjoyment. Having walked to the end of Trafalgar Road, he ascended Pentonville Hill, and found himself in Upper Street, Islington. Nobody here was likely to know him. The first shop he entered was a sixpenny bazaar. The proprietor pledged himself to sell you any article displayed for sixpence. If you should light upon a thing worth a shilling, or two shillings (there was really no limit) the loss was his. And his liability was not limited to displayed things. This had been proved. A gentleman (one of the real kind, with patent-leather boots) once entered the shop, placed a sovereign upon the counter, and demanded the

very best vase that money could purchase. The shopkeeper brought to light an almost priceless piece of glassware in chocolate and gold. But the gentleman had put back his sovereign into his pocket, and now insisted that the vase should be sold to him for sixpence, and the law upheld his claim. It was calling the shop a sixpenny bazaar that did the mischief. Another man would have had the dangerous words painted out, but the proprietor was confident that he could protect himself. As for the story, he would neither confirm it nor deny it? It might be true, or, again, it might not; but he would take precious good care that no one else humbugged him. Deluded man! Not a day passed since the story had got about without the woman he left in charge being similarly victimized. Children would ask for an article to cost five shillings, and when it was produced, claim it for sixpence. If the woman demurred, mere toddlers would threaten her with the police. It was creditable that she never allowed defeat to sour her.

"Seeing as you insist, I suppose you must 'ave it; but if the boss knew that that corfy-jug had gorn for sixpence, he would give me the sack, and a bag to put it in."

Some people can jest upon the edge of a precipice.

The Rabbit entered the shop ignorant of all this; indeed, he had not noticed that it was a sixpenny bazaar.

"I want a work-box for a lady," he said loftily, "to cost ten shillings."

"Ten shillings," said the saleswoman in a thick whisper, "then I have got the very thing for you."

She spoke in a whisper because a crowd of ragged children had congregated at the doorway, and she did not wish to be overheard. But they heard, bless you! and repeated the remark among themselves.

The woman dived behind the counter, and rose breathless to the surface with a shell box.

"How much?"

" 'Arfer sovrin."

The bewildered boy could only gasp "Why?"

"They are all real shells," said the woman. "There is not a single imitation shell on the box. If you buy it and can find an imitation shell, you may call me a liar."

It occurred to the boy that to pay ten shillings for this privilege was excessive.

"I could get it for sixpence," he said contemptuously.

"If you say that," said the woman, "you must have it."

"What for?"

"Sixpence, of course."

"But you said half a sovereign."

"I said 'arfer sovrin, and it is worth 'arfer sovrin, and more. But you have beat me down."

The Rabbit made for the door. He liked cheapening things as much as any one, but such sudden falls made him giddy.

The children around the door resented this *dénouement.*

"Make her give it to you!" they cried. "She's

got to give it for sixpence, or you can have her locked up."

The boy had quite a difficulty to force his way out. Even then the crowd did not disperse. Sharp little eyes followed the treasure to its place of concealment, and dirty little fingers pointed this out. Within half an hour a company had been formed, with a subscribed capital of sixpence, and for this miserably inadequate sum the ten-shilling shell box changed hands.

As for Bunny Ford, he was more than a little disturbed by the episode. The pitfalls encompassing the unwary shopper were evidently more dangerous than he had thought. Who would have supposed that there existed such trade discounts?

The next shop he entered was almost a good one. A lady wearing steel jewelry waited upon him.

"Work-box? Certainly, here is a very attractive line for five shillings."

She showed this first, not in the least expecting to make a sale, but with a view of humbling the

boy, and making him feel how good it was of her, accustomed to these larger dealings, to supply his humble wants.

The Rabbit made a bid of threepence, and came near to being hustled out of the shop. But the half-sovereign, carelessly revealed, saved him.

By its softening light the woman saw in this customer an attractive young gentleman with an enviable gift of humour.

"I wanted to see if you was like the other woman," said Roger.

"Five shillings is our price; and if this was Christmas week, we should be asking five and four. It is a beautiful work-box. If you went to Dalton and Pauling's, in Piccadilly, they would charge you ten shillings; but you wouldn't get a better box—you'd pay the other five shillings for the name."

Roger made a mental note that his purchase should be made at Dalton and Pauling's. As for this box, he rejected it contemptuously.

"It's not wanted for a Sunday-school treat kid," he said, "but for a young lady. If I was to give her a work-box like this, she would laugh."

"What's the matter with it?" asked the woman, impressed in spite of herself by the child's superiority. This was the most expensive article of the kind in stock, and hitherto she had admired it greatly.

"It is imitation."

"Imitation what?"

"An imitation work-box. I will go to Dalton and Pauling's, in Piccadilly. They may charge me ten shillings, but they will give me a real one."

He walked out of the shop, the woman looking after him with unseeing eyes. In a beautiful vision she saw herself the mother of this child and chastising him vigorously.

In the days that followed, quite a proportion of the Islington ladies keeping fancy shops had similar day dreams. The meeker of them wept. To see that serene child, after cheapening one's entire stock, walk out with the half-sovereign intact in

his hand, was too much for shopkeeping flesh and blood.

On the eighth day, the last of the holidays, Roger Ford walked to Piccadilly. There was no difficulty about finding Dalton and Pauling's. It was not a large shop, but he noticed that carriages were constantly drawing up at its door. Clearly there would be nothing about a present bought here to remind the little lady that it had come to her from an inferior.

The work-box he selected was the very smallest shown to him at ten shillings. The fittings were not remarkable, but both inside and out the box looked and smelt good. It was of rosewood, and had inlaid work at the corners and upon the lid. He was quiet when it was being wrapped up—not remorseful, but awed at spending such a sum.

The gentleman that had served him (the youngster did not doubt that this beautifully dressed shop assistant was a perfect gentleman, and his intuition was a true one) noticed his abstraction, and misread it.

"If you change your mind when you get home, you can return the box and have your money back. We won't even require you to purchase anything else in its place."

For eight days Roger Ford kept the work-box a secret, although there were times when he felt that he must rush out into the street and bring in the first person he met to admire it. The daintiness of it fascinated him. He was glad the wood was dark; it helped him to picture Margaret's hair and eyes. He would dim the lid with his breath, and polish it with his handkerchief until it became a mirror. Having such a thing in the attic was as sweetly incongruous as though the little lady herself in her braided crimson frock were lying there, waited upon by him and Bill. How nice she looked in her room, with her white hands outside the coverlet. He had been struck with her from the first, on that memorable day when he and Claude had nearly fought; but it was only the last few days that he had been conscious of caring so very much for her. He had had dreams of eclips-

ing Claude Tyrell and all other well-dressed boys, but without tracing them to their source. He could not understand the change. It had been wrought by the work-box. Around this all that had been in solution in his thoughts had collected and crystallized.

One point troubled him. Some writing must accompany the present, and what should this be? "Margaret, with Roger's love," seemed simple and appropriate, but Mrs. Tyrell might disapprove. What did people say when they gave presents? He recalled one case in point, when the pupil-teachers at the Broad-school had given an inkstand to a retiring headmistress. "To Miss ———, as a token of esteem and gratitude from the undersigned." It was hard to see how this could be bettered. "The undersigned" was a good-sounding title, and the Rabbit rather fancied himself under it.

Returning from school on the afternoon of Margaret's birthday, Roger Ford took a step that many would regard as foolhardy. He visited

Mrs. Peters, on the first floor back, and intimated that she might wash him—indeed, gave her permission to proceed to any lengths.

"Pitch in," he said, "and don't mind hurting me any more than if I was one of your own kids."

The small Peters were aghast that any one enjoying the Rabbit's immunities should thus throw them away. Mrs. Peters surpassed herself. The secret of her method was plenty of hard yellow soap, very little water, and a high polish. The effects of her ministrations were still apparent when the object of them arrived at the Tyrells'. Roger Ford entered the dining-room—the company were seated at tea—with his cheeks aflame, and his forehead shining like a halo. He was not the only guest. The boy from next door was present (of course), his younger sister, and two of Margaret's old schoolfellows.

After tea they flocked upstairs, and the birthday heroine received them in state. Roger was a little afraid that Margaret would show surprise at seeing him, but she welcomed him as though she

had been expecting him, as perhaps she had. She lay surrounded by presents. The boy from next door had surpassed his folly of the previous year by giving her an inkstand in the form of a miniature cricket set.

"It is a rotten thing!" he said politely, when Margaret praised it. "I only bought it because there was nothing else in the shop."

"And that is the lot," said Max, when all had been shown and praised.

"You have not seen my present yet," said the Rabbit, who had successfully smuggled the workbox into the room.

"How good of you to remember me!" said the girl.

"Is it something you have made yourself?" asked her mother.

"Open it and see," said the giver.

The parcel was put upon the couch, and Margaret fumbled with the string.

"I am sure it is something very nice," said Mrs. Tyrell.

Every one was prepared to be enthusiastic in a slightly patronizing way. Margaret meant to say that this present—poor and shabby as it would appear beside the others—pleased her most of all. Below the brown paper were wrappings of tissue paper, and a sheet with writing: "Presented to Miss Margaret Tyrell, as a token of esteem and gratitude from the undersigned."

"Very nice," said Mrs. Tyrell, restraining a desire to laugh.

And then the tissue paper was removed, and every one could see the beautiful lid.

"None of them other kids ever gave you a present like that."

The invalid gave a little cry of astonishment.

"Thank you. But how could you? Oh! how could you?"

"I found some money on the pavement and spent it on this. What's the odds? Nobody's any poorer."

Although the boy did not understand why, he felt himself upon the defensive.

Then there was a period of silence, although everybody was trying to think of something to say. All felt the pathos of this lavish generosity. Margaret bent her head to the box and feigned to be investigating it, but the failure was too complete to be ignored.

"Crying, Margaret," said her mother affectionately, "because you have been given a beautiful present? What a very silly little girl!"

"I promise I won't ever give you anything else," said the poor Rabbit penitently.

Then Margaret burst out laughing, a couple of tears falling on the coverlet like the last bright drops of a shower in the sun.

Then every one began praising the present at once, and the tension was over.

"Wherever did you go to choose such a beautiful one?" asked Mrs. Tyrell.

"Dalton and Pauling's, in Piccadilly."

The lady opened her eyes.

"You must have spent a fortune."

The girl visitors meanwhile were examining the

fittings, and revealing their feelings in staccato shrieks of appreciation.

"Good old undersigned!" cried Walter, and smote the giver upon the back.

"My birthday is in December," said Max. "I should like a gold watch."

"Thank you very much indeed, Roger," said Margaret. "I shall never use another work-box as long as I live."

The Rabbit was quite happy now. This was how he had pictured things. There had been a terrible minute when he had seemed very far from these people whom he wanted so badly as friends; but this had passed at the word "Roger."

Mrs. Tyrell left the juveniles to themselves, and they settled down to play "White Horse." Roger was ignorant of this noble game, but he quickly mastered it, and Margaret supervised his purchases of cards. They were not partners but very friendly neighbours. It was a most hilarious game. Max was tremendously funny as auctioneer, surprising players into absurd bids for

cards that were almost worthless. The girl from next door was a frequent victim. Max would put up the bell and hammer, and advance the price rapidly—entirely by his own bids—until, carried away by excitement, the next door girl's shrill voice would join in, and then in a flash the card would be knocked down to her. For a second the round little face would be clouded; but Walter, who sat beside her, would slip a number of his cowries into her hand, when she would become more radiant than ever. So the transaction pleased everybody, and the pool benefited, which shows what a capital auctioneer Max must have been.

Then they had a party supper, the boys carrying round lemonade and sandwiches and cakes to the girls, who sat up against the wall. There was space in the middle of the room, but things have more the right party relish when one's chair-back is against the wall. Roger waited upon the one that did not sit by the wall.

"You will come and see me again, Roger," Margaret said at the end of the evening, when Claude

and he were about to start for the railway station. (Mrs. Tyrell insisted upon the child riding, and paid the fare.)

The boys did not talk much on their way to the station; but when they were promenading the platform, Claude told Roger a great secret. When they were grown up, Walter would marry the girl from next door. It had been settled that evening.

"She is only a kid," said Claude, "and Walter might have had a much bigger girl, but she is very pretty."

"I did not look at her," said the Rabbit.

Perhaps Roger Ford had never felt so happy as during that train ride to King's Cross. Even while the events of the evening had been happening, they had not given him the pleasure they did in this golden retrospect. There had been so many claims upon his attention then that he had had little time to realize how happy he was. Two hours afterwards he was looking back upon this journey, almost incredulous that he could ever have found the world so bright. The change in his out-

look occurred while he was climbing the dirty stairs leading to the room that was his home. On a landing above, two voices were contending—Mrs. Peters' and Bill's. Some time since, the latter had borrowed a few shillings for boots, and the first floor considered that there had been remissness in the matter of repaying. There was nothing alarming in this, or particularly novel. Mrs. Peters had lent money before, and recovered it by uncivil process, and no doubt she would do both again.

"I can't help it," Bill was saying. "You know I'd pay if I 'ad it."

" 'Ad it. You could 'ave it fast enough if you didn't go trapesing about with that Louisa, as you call her." (Mrs. Peters' tone suggested that a sensible and right-feeling young man would have called the girl by some other name—Emily, perhaps, or Kate.) "You 'ad the money to take your Louisa to the theatre. Don't you say you didn't, now, because I can bring those who saw you both there with their own eyes."

"She paid. It was as much as I could run to buy 'er a penn'oth of suckers."

"And what do you call yerself, letting a girl pay?"

"She gets better money than me," said Bill sullenly, "and I 'ave the kid to keep."

"More fool you! Why don't 'e earn somethink for 'isself, imperdent little beggar? I'd like to box 'is ears."

"You let the Rabbit alone," said the hobbledehoy hotly, "or I'll get my gang to put a mark on you—see?"

" 'Oo wants to touch 'im? 'E could bring 'ome somethink if 'e liked; but 'e prefers acting the lord and sponging upon you. Hallo!" she continued in a different voice, "if it isn't the noble Rabbit 'imself returned from visiting 'is lady! Come down and tell me and Peters all about it. Come down both of you boys and have a whack at my cold meat."

The woman had only been rowing for the sake of rowing, and wished to make the child forget—if he had overheard—her cruel remarks.

But the child passed her with set face, and Bill followed him into the room, and shut the door.

"Who minds what that old hag says? She doesn't pay for you."

"You was listening to her."

"You young idiot! You know if I have ever grudged you."

"I can go away," said the child.

"I've a great mind to lam you with my belt."

The Rabbit turned his back upon his friend and began to undress. Bill watched him irresolutely for a minute, and then went across, seized him by the elbows, and turned him round.

"You let me go, Bill, or I will dot you!"

"Look 'ere. Are you mad with me, or are you not?"

"I am *not*. You have always been a trump. Oh, Bill, I wish I was dead!"

The hobbledehoy did his best to soothe the child, but his very kindness added to the latter's distress. It was this good old Bill he had treated so shabbily. A fortnight ago he would not have

given Mrs. Peters' words a thought. He was not sensitive about accepting assistance, or overwhelmingly grateful for it (there has been something very wrong with a child's experience if he is either one or the other; indeed, the matter-of-fact way children accept our acts of kindness is the one compliment they pay us); but to have had the chance of doing something for himself and Bill, and to have refused it, was contemptible. He could have brought something home, but he had preferred to act the lord and sponge upon Bill. What that old beast had said was quite true. Old Bill could only spare a penny for his girl; but he must waste ten shillings upon a stranger, who very likely despised him. (The poor child had got to that.) By rights it was Bill's money he had thrown away.

How had he come to behave so badly? Partly he could explain it. He had found the coin when the wish to give Margaret a present filled his mind, and he had devoted the money to that without a thought about right and wrong. Until the dreadful moment when he heard Mrs. Peters' speech, he

had not reflected that anything was due to his pal.

The Rabbit by this time was in bed, and the wronged but unconscious Bill was snoring lustily beside him.

"I never thought to give Bill anything, never once!" sobbed the child, with his head under the bedclothes, "or I'd a-give it him. I'd give him everything I've got if I could only take back what I have done!"

And then suddenly the words of the gentleman in the shop came back to him: "If you should regret the purchase, I will return your money."

The recollection and the suggestion seemed to come in answer to his wish, but he fought against them.

"That is what the gentleman said, but he wouldn't do it—not likely."

But in his heart the Rabbit *knew* that the attendant would be as good as his word.

"Well, I won't take it back anyway. I couldn't."

The fight continued until he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. It was not only pride that had to be conquered, but there was also the feeling that in asking for the box back he would be acknowledging that it was impossible for him in any way to affect Margaret's life.

It took him two days to win his battle, and until it was gained he was, perhaps, the most miserable and the most bitterly self-contemptuous boy in the North of London. When he set off for the Tyrells', there was in his heart little of the elation of victory. He had made up his mind what to do when he arrived there. He would walk straight up and see Margaret, ask for the work-box to be given back to him, and then leave the house, if possible, without speaking to another member of the family. When they heard what he had done, they might say what they chose. What did it matter? He was never going to see them again.

Unfortunately for the success of this plan, Mr. Tyrell saw the lad approaching and went to the door. The arrival was particularly timely. Only

that morning Mr. Tyrell had returned from the country, and being told of the present to Margaret, had been very much disturbed.

"You should have refunded the poor boy his money. I am surprised at your letting him go away without it," he said to Mrs. Tyrell.

"I couldn't do that without wounding his feelings. Of course, I shall make it up to him in another way."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Tyrell, "boys that age are what men were in the savage era. They have no feelings themselves or mercy for their fellows."

"I don't think, John, you realize how very sensitive boys are."

"Never having been a boy myself! You would have them as thin-skinned as young ladies."

"Margaret," said Mrs. Tyrell, "is thicker-skinned than our boys."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Tyrell, a little ruffled that his wife would not accept his *ipse dictum* upon a matter where he must know better than she.

Therefore he hurried to meet Roger Ford, anxious both to do a kind action and to prove himself right. He tackled the youngster without delay.

"Ah, Roger! I am very glad to see you. They have been telling me about the splendid present you made to Margaret. It was very kindly meant, but you know it is wrong to spend money so recklessly. How much did it cost?"

"Ten shillings."

"Well, here is a half-sovereign. Margaret is not to know about this, nor the boys. Consult some grown-up person another time. I am sure you cannot have any money for giving presents."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! I know I ought not to have given so much, but I never thought."

There was only pleasure in the boy's eyes—not a trace of embarrassment. The imminence of a greater humiliation had destroyed the feeling for the less. Mr. Tyrell could not know this, or suspect how differently his offer would have been taken upon the evening of the birthday.

"Tell me. Would you rather have had the money back in this way, or that I should have made it up to you without you knowing?"

"Oh, this way, ever so much."

"That is what I thought. Mrs. Tyrell is sitting with Margaret. Would you mind running up and taking her place for a few minutes, as I wish to speak to her?"

The Rabbit waited for no second bidding. Upon the staircase he met Mrs. Tyrell, who was hurrying down to beg her husband not to carry out his views. She knew he was wrong. The sight of Roger's wonderful happiness confused her.

In the breakfast-room she found her husband, only less radiant than the boy.

"Well, Kate, I have given Roger his money back, and told him that he couldn't afford to make presents. His heart is not broken, quite."

"Forgive me, John. You were quite right."

"Naturally. You see, I enjoy the advantage of having been a boy, and I remember perfectly."

In the meantime Roger had gained the landing and had knocked at Margaret's door.

"Come in," she called.

He opened the door and entered timidly. Much of his self-confidence had been taken from him since he was here last.

Thinking it was one of the servants, Margaret did not look up. With *his* work-box open beside her, the girl was at work upon a doll's outfit. She was biting off a thread, in the most knowing and captivating way, when her brown eyes, travelling up, met the Rabbit's fascinated gaze. With the warmest and cheeriest nod imaginable, she made him welcome.

The Passing of Pharaoh

THE three boys were down in the breakfast-room when the single knock came at the front door.

"I fancy it is a man from Rogers," said Max casually. "Walter, you might run up and see."

(Rogers was a veterinary surgeon of some repute. The Tyrells' four-year-old pedigree St. Bernard, registered at the Kennel Club under the name of Pharaoh 2073, had been sent to him to be operated upon for a cancerous growth upon the elbow.)

"In a second," said Walter, making a display of putting up his paints. "It won't hurt the man to wait a second."

Once outside the breakfast-room, however, he began to run, and he charged the basement stairs like a squadron of horse.

Max resumed his reading.

"Do you think Pharaoh can be worse?" whispered the nine-year-old Claude, when Walter did not return.

"I should say that the dog was dead, and that the end of the world was coming," said the big boy with an obvious reference to the youngster's scared face.

"I would give a pound to hear that Old Pharaoh was better," Claude said defiantly.

Max made a gesture of impatience. "How on earth do you think I can read with you talking?"

At last the front door slammed (what a deal the man had had to say!), and then Walter could be heard going upstairs. Apparently it occurred to him that his brothers might be interested in the bulletin, for he came downstairs again as far as the upper passage.

"Max," he shouted, "Pharaoh is dead," and went away to look for a lost fretwork pattern.

"A pity," said Max, and became absorbed in his book.

Tertius sat straight up in the middle of his chair, and watched Primus as if fascinated.

"There is no book like Pickwick," said Max; "I could read it for ever."

Nevertheless a few minutes later he yawned violently, and threw the volume down upon the table.

"I will go upstairs and clear up my room," he said, addressing no one in particular. "Goodness knows it needs clearing."

Left to himself Claude sat on, staring straight ahead of him, and gripping the back of his chair with both hands. His brow knitted, but he was thinking about nothing, or at least that was his aim. Thoughts would come, thoughts radiating from the word "never," but he cast them out time and again. After a while he became aware that his efforts were being frustrated by a sound of sniffing from the kitchen. He ran out and found the stout cook, a good natured soul, but soft as butter, drying her eyes.

The child stammered out something about

Pharaoh, but the woman turned upon him quite fiercely.

"You boys fancy that no one in the house has anything to think about but your precious dog—bah!"

Then she blew her nose violently, and went on with her task, making away with the utensils that had been devoted to the St. Bernard—his saucepan, the stockpot in which fragments had been collected for him, and the plate from which he had fed. These she threw into the dustbin, making a separate journey with each article.

"Look at these bones; I collected them thinking that Pharaoh would need something to pull him round when he returned, now they will just be thrown away."

She sat down upon a Windsor chair and cried quietly.

"Don't think I am crying about your dog; I would not so demean myself. I am crying for an aunt I lost, an aunt—but there, she was more like a mother to me than an aunt."

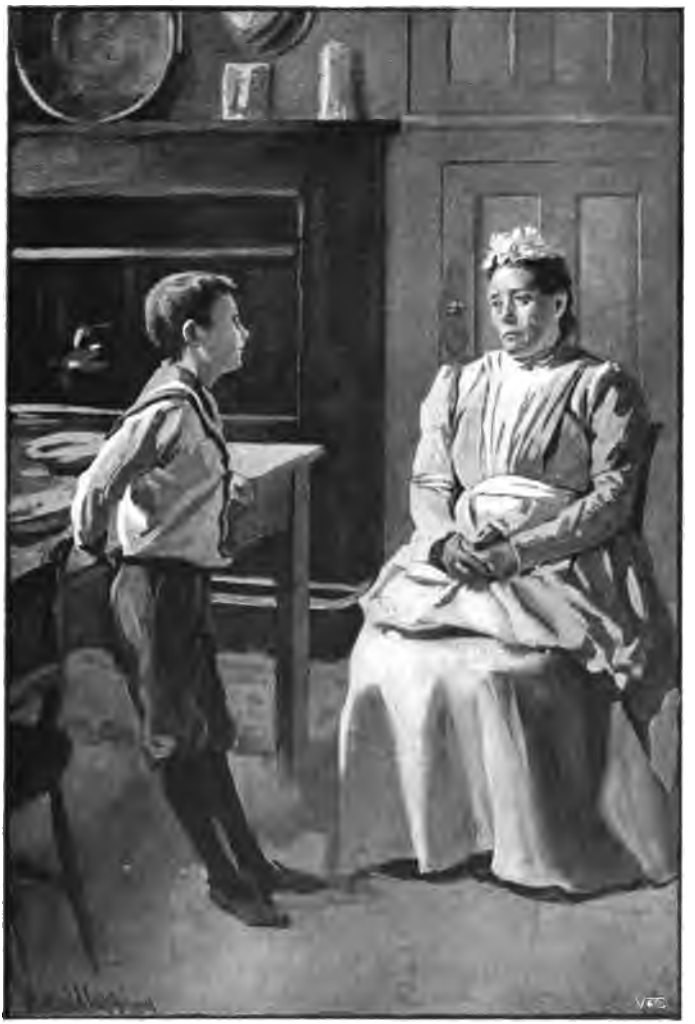
"When did she die?" asked Claude in an awed whisper.

"You want to know too much," snapped the woman, not being able, at that moment, to think of a better answer.

"Do you remember how Pharaoh used to bark at your new bonnet?" said Claude, trying to divert her thoughts from her bereavement, but the remark brought on a paroxysm.

"She was a good dear lady," said the cook, becoming a little calmer. "We buried her in Brompton Cemetery. The wreaths would not have gone under that table. It was this very day twelvemonth, and then I am to be told that I am crying about a brown and white dog, that was more trouble than enough. Taking into account what I did for him as a puppy, a child would not have given the trouble."

"He was very grateful," said Claude. "No one ever did anything for that dog but he remembered it, and sooner or later paid for it with a great lick. I would give anything for another lick from him



"'SHE WAS A DEAR, GOOD LADY,' SAID THE COOK. 'WE BURIED HER IN BROMPTON CEMETERY—THE WREATHS WOULD NOT HAVE GONE UNDER THAT TABLE.'"

ing that on the occasion in question the poor animal had been seeking sympathy rather than bestowing it.

"I know he was bad, and that's what makes it so good of him coming up all those stairs to inquire after me. 'All right, Pharaoh,' I called through the door. 'Don't cry for me, you will see cook down to-morrow.' And that very night he was packed off to one of these slashers and carvers. There's a deal to be answered for if the truth be known."

And the cook threw an apron over her head and rocked to and fro.

"Is it for Pharaoh you are crying now?" the child whispered. "For your aunt and for Pharaoh just a little?"

"Ah, Master Claude, may you never know what sorrow is. To think of that good woman lying out there in Brompton Cemetery. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

Claude went back into the breakfast-room visibly affected. He was not ashamed of his emotion

(the death of a human being is a subject for tears), but considerably embarrassed that there had been a call for emotion on this particular night. Any one ignorant of the cook's bereavement, seeing him now, would certainly misjudge him. No one ever had properly understood him but Pharaoh. Poor old pup! How it would have troubled him to see his favourite ("I know he liked me best," sobbed the child) with face buried thus in his hands. He would have forced his blunt nose between the hands, and removed the tear stains with one vast consolatory lick. You couldn't keep in the blues long with the St. Bernard beside you. There was something so brave and wise about his outlook. He understood things (who could doubt it?) and saw no reason for despair. Even this trouble about the cook's aunt would be bearable if it were possible to take counsel with that sagacious old face. But it never would be possible. Pharaoh would not come again. His blunt nose would be pushed no more into the boy's affairs. No more troubles would be smoothed by

that rough tongue. Others would try to console and would start by misjudging. Better, far better, to shut one's self in one's bedroom than be wronged by such pity. So Claude made a dash for his room, to collide upon the stairs with his mother. She held out her arms, but he ducked under them and escaped. No blame attached to him, but the knowledge that it had been her intention to lift him from the ground turned him hot with shame.

One of the most painful things about mothers is that they lack the sense of years. They may hide the defect, but a crisis will always reveal it. A nine-year-old son is in trouble, and it is seen that in his mother's thought he has been all along as a babe. Fourteen years even is no certain protection —ay nor forty years either.

Claude found Walter in possession of their joint bedroom, and his toe was under the door. And while he stood upon the landing the bolt in Max's room was shot home. Coming downstairs again

Claude wandered into the drawing-room, and found his father staring out at the garden.

"Wonderful how the days are lengthening," Mr. Tyrell said briskly, without turning around.

Claude closed the door and returned to the breakfast-room. No one disturbed him; indeed, for the next hour it was as though the house were empty. At supper, however, the full company was present, and the meal was wildly hilarious. Max made jokes, and the younger boys shrieked with laughter at them.

"My dear Claude," said Mrs. Tyrell anxiously, "I am afraid you will be ill."

Then in the highest of spirits the boys trooped up to their sister's bedroom.

"I have been crying my eyes out about Pharaoh," said the little invalid; "I thought you would have too."

The boys looked at one another with eyebrows slightly raised. It was ineradicable then, this

feminine trick of judging the superior sex by the lower.

"To think," said the little girl, "that I shall never awake and see old Pharaoh sitting up by my bed. He put his tongue out when I opened my eyes, and I always used to think he was laughing."

"There, there," said Max hurriedly, "what is the good of distressing yourself?"

"Poor Claudy," said the girl, "you never could get Pharaoh to treat you as a grown-up. Do you remember when he was a puppy how he used to push you into corners, and lick your bare legs?"

"You will be making yourself cry again," said Claude gruffly.

"I believe pa wanted to cry, taking Pharaoh back."

This taking the dog back had been the worst pull of all. Even his death had been less poignant. The necessity had arisen thus. The first day the sick dog was at the vet's, and before the operation had been performed, he made a wonderful escape (ill as he was), to turn up twenty hours

later, a most pitiable object, at the Tyrells' front door. His coat and shirt front (that glorious white shirt front, the joy of those who brushed him) were matted with mud and clay; he was dead with fatigue, and bleeding from bramble scratches on the nose. Further evidence of his cross-country roamings were the bits of hedgerow in his tail. But the unbearable thing was the poor beast's conviction that he had deserved well of the family. There was not a doubt in his mind that they would all be as pleased at the reunion as he was. He was lying before the kitchen fire when the boys came down to breakfast: there was a noble self-applause in the faint tapping of his tail. They patted him and said "Good old Pharaoh," knowing very well that it was their clear duty to say "Bad dog" to discourage him from escaping another time.

"He must go back," said Max.

"Bags I don't take him," said Walter.

Max said, "I will take him, he is my dog," but when Mr. Tyrell volunteered, Max was glad enough to escape the task.

All the day the boys hung about the sick St. Bernard, bathing his face, and brushing his coat, until Pilgrim himself would have been proud of such a grandson; but when the hour of departure approached, one by one they slipped out of the house. There is a blind turning that cuts the road to the station at right angles, and here, to their mutual discomfiture, the boys met. They had not very long to wait. Mr. Tyrell and the St. Bernard passed very slowly across the top of the road. The dog's huge head was down. It did not do to wonder what was in his heart.

"When he left the house that last time," said Margaret, "he gave one bark, a good-bye he was calling up to me. I would have given anything to let him know that we were not tired of him. He was so fond of us, and I am sure we were as fond of him—we were, oh, we were!"

"There, there," said Max, not unkindly, for he remembered that she was an invalid, and a girl, "you will be upsetting us next. Fancy, Walter and Claude and me in a row, crying like three babies!"

It was a humorous picture, and the boys laughed boisterously.

"It isn't as if Pharaoh was a human being," said Claude; "there would be some sense in crying then."

"Don't boys ever cry?" said Margaret. "I should think it must be dreadful feeling ever so, and keeping it in."

"What is the good of bothering about what can't be altered?" said Max.

> "'If there is a remedy, find it;
> If not, never mind it.'"

He looked at his brothers, who nodded assent. The couplet expressed their views to a nicety.

"Silly things, girls," said Walter, when they were outside.

"I don't know," said Claude (Margaret being his chum in the family he stuck up for her, even when, as in the present instance, criticism was justified); "you see, Maggie spends all her time on her back, and when we were away Pharaoh used to sit with her for hours. He was like a nurse to her."

"I don't want to listen to that rot," said Walter roughly. "You are almost as bad as a girl yourself."

Claude crept up to bed, and having undressed, deliberately turned out the gas, a thing that Walter had forbidden under penalties. However, the elder boy when he came up did not seem to notice that anything was wrong. He undressed in the dark, and then (such was his absence of mind) climbed into Claude's bed.

"Claudy, old man, what is the matter? I ought not to have said you were like a girl."

"It wasn't that," gulped the youngster; "you can call me what you like."

"I know. It is about old Pharaoh?"

"Likely I would cry about a dog! I wouldn't demean myself to cry about a dog."

"What is it then, Claudy? You might tell a fellow."

The child required some pressing, but at last his story came with a rush—the cook's aunt, her virtues and untimely end.

"Cook was throwing away Pharaoh's bones and things when she told me."

"It must be dreadful," said Walter, with his lip trembling, "to lose a relation like that."

"She was more like a mother to cook than an aunt," Claude sobbed. "They buried her in Brompton Cemetery, and the wreaths wouldn't have gone under the kitchen table."

"When did it happen?" said Walter, his voice faltering.

"The funeral was a year ago this very day. Such a funeral, cook says, as you never saw."

"Tell me more," whispered Walter, wanting fuller justification for the emotion that was mastering him.

Claude retailed all of the cook's conversation that he could call to mind, adding details and pathetic touches where the narrative seemed to demand them, heightening the aunt's virtues, and lengthening her funeral cortège until Walter broke down utterly and the two brothers, for all their joint twenty years, wept in each other's arms. Never was a woman more truly mourned.

Minnows and Tritons

AT the Coal Merchants' School in High Holborn, Mr. Gange combined the duties of the detention-room with the care of a preparatory class. In the latter, twenty or thirty incredibly small boys were coached for the entrance examination to the Lower First. A few aspired as high as the lowest class but one. The preparatory boys did not have the same hours as the school. The youngsters were at work all the time the school boys were undergoing their punishment, occupying the front forms. Mr. Gange was thirty years old, degreeless, prospectless, and wholly without ambition. You knew that directly you noticed his shifting, watery eyes. His hair was straw-coloured, his face pimpled, and he had no perceptible eyelashes. He was quite unfitted for his calling, and recognized this without shame.

His pupils could take any liberties with him. For this reason the detention boys behaved particularly well. They watched the preparatory boys and their safe escapades with disdain, and when they happened to catch the eye of a trifler, sternly motioned him to go on with his work. The tradition of the school was to treat Mr. Gange with lofty friendliness, and it was generally believed that the detention hours were oases in his life. Mewed up all day with these paltry infants, how he must welcome the arrival of boys of nobler sort! It was thought a kindly act to stroll up to his desk for five minutes' chat. The idea was that it did him good with his pupils to be seen conversing with boys half-way up the school upon equal terms. The usual topic was the progress of boys in the upper classes, who, being exempt from detention, had soared beyond Mr. Gange's ken.

"I was talking at lunch to Saunders, of the Fifth. I told him I was going to see you this afternoon, and he asked to be remembered."

"That would be W. J. Saunders, I suppose? It

seems only yesterday that he used to come in here. He took a double promotion, if I am not mistaken, from the Upper Third, with B. J. Klopstein, an old pupil of mine. I hope to see both Klopstein and Saunders in the Sixth."

(Perhaps the boys were right, and it was pleasant to Mr. Gange to be kept in touch with the great world.)

It was the misfortune of Walter Tyrell to break this kindly tradition. He had no intention of so doing, but was led away by indignation at seeing two of Mr. Gange's pupils talking. He ordered them to desist. One of the delinquents cheeked him, and when he walked forward and slapped his head, the preparatory boy turned, and struck him, a member of the school, with sacrilegious fist. For a wonder Mr. Gange took note of the occurrence.

"How dare you leave your seat, sir!" he screamed at Walter. "Go back immediately!"

Walter did not wish to be rude, but to obey a preparatory-master seemed lowering. On the spur of the moment he could think of nothing better

than feigning deafness, and, with hand to ear, asking the master, respectfully, to speak louder.

Mr. Gange descended from his desk and boxed his ears. The boy returned the blow.

Mr. Gange hesitated, and then walked away. It was dangerous work striking a boy, and forbidden by the head-master. It would be very much safer just to let the matter drop.

Walter Tyrell went home fancying himself something of a hero.

At Moorgate Street Station it happened that the cause of the disturbance, a ten-year-old, named Reginald Cook, was seated in a railway compartment when Walter entered it with some friends.

The child's lips went white, but he stood up and doubled his soft fists, prepared to die game. Now, Walter was a good two years older, besides being heavier for his age, and there was small chance for him of credit from the encounter.

"All right, big 'un," he said, "I know you hit me last; but your master took it up for you, and you saw what I did to *him*."

"You *have* a nerve," said the small boy, with so flattering an emphasis upon the verb that Walter's heart was won, and Master Reggie, who had looked for a painful fight, found himself treated as a friend; and being allowed an equal share in a rough and tumble, he made part of the journey very pleasantly under the seat.

"They were four to our three, or we would have beaten them," said Walter, when the party broke up.

He, Reggie, and an ink-stained boy in spectacles were travelling further than the others.

"We'd take them on again."

"Rather," said Reggie.

"Any time you see us in a carriage, get in," said Walter.

His new friend explained that he did not live in this direction, but was on his way to tea with an aunt. His home was near Clarence Park.

"What sort of a place is Clarence Park?" asked Walter doubtfully.

"The cricket-pitches are just bare patches, but

some fine clubs play there. Have you ever heard of a club called the 'Duke of Wellington' ?"

"Never."

"Well, I am captain of it. See here!" He took from his satchel a copy of the *North London Sentinel.*

"There is a bit about it here." He pointed to an item among the cricket reports.

Walter read aloud: "'Silver Star' *versus* 'Duke of Wellington.' This match was played in Clarence Park last Saturday afternoon, and was won by the 'Silver Star' by nine runs. For the winners, Smith batted well and Jones bowled well; and for the losers, Johnson bowled well and Reginald Cook batted well."

"Reginald Cook is me," said the child proudly.

The detailed score showed that the combined innings of the "Duke of Wellington" fell short of forty, Reggie's contribution being two threes.

The schoolboys laughed, but nevertheless they were impressed. Except in the promotion lists, their names had never figured in print.

"What made them say that about your batting well?"

"I wrote it myself," said the preparatory boy, as if that explained everything. "You play for the 'Duke of Wellington,' and I'll put in a bit about you."

Walter laughed uproariously. The suggestion was in every way ridiculous, but he was sorry it had not been delayed until the next station, when his schoolfellow got out.

"I don't always write the first bit like that. Sometimes I only give one name on each side instead of two, and say the match was won by the fine all-round play of one chap, and lost by the fine all-round play of another."

"Jolly for the other chap!" said the boy with the ink stains. "I tell you what it is, my lad: you are a genius, and ought to be taking the composition class in the place of old Andrews."

Walter did not like this wholesale ridicule. It was easy to pick holes, but the critic had never

written for the Press, and perhaps did not know the rules.

"You'd be jolly glad to see your writings in the newspaper," he said.

"No, I wouldn't."

"Yes, you would. How about that account of your holidays you sent to the *School Magazine*, without any stops?"

The ink-stained boy turned crimson. Referring to his literary ambitions was touching him upon the raw. He was not sorry that the train was running into the station.

"Ta-ta, Tyrell!" he said. "Be kind to him, and perhaps he'll give you a place in the 'Duke of Wellington,' and we shall read in the paper that your fine all-round play has lost them a match."

"Jealous little beast!" said Walter, when he and Reggie were alone. "Of course, I could not play for your club; I'd be too big."

"Not you! Why, sometimes men play." This was true. Loafing about the park are men who will push themselves into any game, and so incredi-

bly inept are they that their presence on a child's side does not necessarily decide the result. There is always great clapping when the man is dismissed; but he is scarcely any better than his playfellows, and, strange to say, can hit but very little harder. So Walter promised to play on the following Saturday against that formidable combination, the "Clarence Amateurs." He did not mention his purpose at home, not desiring witnesses, for he had a suspicion that his deeds would look more imposing in the cold simplicity of print.

On the all-eventful afternoon, Walter found awaiting him at the park gates, Reggie, eight other boys, and a Mr. Hout. The last was a stout, red-faced man, in a faded frock-coat and carpet slippers, who had played for the Australians when first-class cricket was better than it is to-day. Fast round-arm bowling was his *forte,* but on Saturdays he could not be put on. Between the point of a match to the right of one, and the short-leg of a match to the left, there is on Saturdays but a nar-

row channel, and Mr. Hout could not find it. A fielder resents a jolt in the back from a bowler in another game, and is not in the least degree mollified by the assurance that the delivery was "one of the same as I used to bowl to W. G." The fire and originality of the man seemed to find expression in these wides.

In batting, Mr. Hout was the best man on the side, owing to a mental obscurity that prevented him from recognizing when he was l.b.w. The most lucid umpire could not persuade him to retire. As, of the balls delivered to Mr. Hout, four out of ten hit him upon the foot or the calf, this was of some importance. He was not a fast scorer, but he had some beautiful strokes, the best being a very late cut. It was made from a ball that was somewhere between wicket-keeper and long-stop. The stroke added nothing to the score, but was valuable as a demonstration.

The legend as to his prowess was accepted universally upon the practice-ground, and his presence upon a side was supposed to confer a certain

amount of distinction, but none of the little boys desired it. He would waylay them at the park gates, so boisterously glad to see them, and so confident that the pleasure was mutual, that no youngster liked to hurt his feelings by telling him he was not wanted. Mr. Hout was not particular as to what club he represented, and on Saturdays, when he might not bowl, he would sometimes bat in half a dozen different games.

It was a tedious business waiting while the "Amateurs" straggled up. Walter, being new to the scene, took a general survey of Clarence Park and its cricket, in which the reader may like to join him.

Although the best clubs played upon the match-ground, where they formed a league and played one another also in cup ties, there were men's clubs (of no little repute in their own world) who played matches upon the practice-ground, sometimes as many as a couple of hundred spectators watching one from the roadway. Men dressed for these contests in black broadcloth suits. A

cricket-cap, often with a gold or silver tassel, crowned the whole. Some maintained that tassels were the prerogative of captains and vice-captains, but the point was doubtful.

The patches, although quite bare, were not bad; indeed, the hardened earth was both truer and safer than the turf of the match-ground. The bowler, unless he brought down a spectator or a player in another game, never looked like injuring any one, but the batsman seemed to live on the edge of manslaughter. Bearded giants would be swiping furiously at leg balls, and three yards from them, little boys, with their backs turned, would be happily quarrelling with each other, oblivious to the fact that any moment might be their last. Fortunately the park match player never lets himself go except at leg balls, which he invariably misses. With other balls, wherever pitched, he takes no liberty, choosing instead that incessant watchfulness which is said to be its equivalent or price.

Figures show that the safest position in London

is the centre of a park, with one's back to a dozen batsmen bent upon one's destruction.

But this overcrowding, although not injurious, causes plentiful inconvenience. To have other matches cutting off the in-field from the out is no slight drawback. It is on record that a new member, put to field-cover and long-on, was thanked for every ball he returned. Men get sent away to the long-field, and they never come back. An innings closes, the field picks itself out like pieces of a Chinese puzzle, but one is missing. Perhaps he has attached himself to some more interesting game. He has made a lucky catch of a neighbour's ball, and the unsuspecting striker has walked sadly away. Without confessing the fraud, the side that has thus accepted his assistance cannot resent his continuance in their game, or deny him an innings subsequently.

But by this time the "Clarence Amateurs" are assembled, and have carried their point about using their own ball. Reggie's club played with a leather match-ball, black from use and as soft as

putty. (Elsewhere has been written the history of this ball.) But the "Amateurs'" was a composition one, many ounces over weight, and as hard as granite. Mr. Hout, anticipating the impact of this missile upon his ankles, was profuse in expressions of disgust.

"I'd like to take that ball away with me," he said, "and show it to W. G."

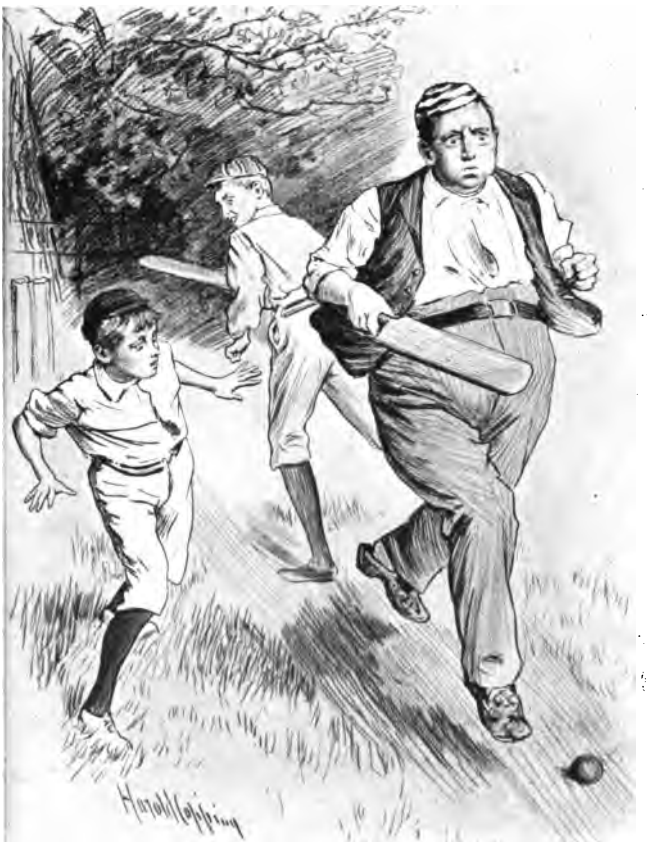
"You'll have to 'piy' for it first, then," said the captain of the "Amateurs," an uncultivated person, but not without observation.

The "Amateurs" won the toss, and of course put their opponents in, the captain wisely starting with sneaks at both ends. For a time wickets were more plentiful than runs, but the game was saved by Walter and Mr. Hout. Walter's success was as much a matter of character as of skill. In similar circumstances, his younger brother Claude would have tried to give these lost lads a notion of style, and have perished miserably. Max, on the other hand, would have been overcome by the ignominy of his surroundings and the hopelessness

of trying to rise above them. Walter was saved from these pitfalls by his powers of self-deception. He intended to succeed, and the newspaper account of his triumph would contain nothing unworthy. Already he was sharing in the delusion he meant Reggie's journalism to create.

Walter's first experience of the composition ball was disconcerting. He came hard down upon a sneak, and the sensation was of having been struck by lightning. His arms tingled, and the ball scarcely moved. For a while he made no further attempt to hit, contenting himself with pushing the ball in front of him and stealing a run. Both batsmen ran down the middle of the wicket, and as one of them weighed some thirteen stone, it may be imagined that small boys were chary about throwing themselves in the path. The bowlers began to get rattled, and to send down balls that pitched, and Walter discovered that these could be hit.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hout was stopping balls with



"SMALL BOYS WERE CHARY ABOUT THROWING THEMSELVES IN THE PATH."

his ankles, like a hero. Early in the play the umpires abandoned hope of getting him to retire l.b.w. They said "Out!" when appealed to, but more as a record of a conscientious opinion than from expectation of any practical outcome. The "Amateurs" consoled themselves with the barren glory of scoring the adverse decisions. They raised a cheer when a two-er—one for the overthrow—put the total of his runs above that of his l.b.w.'s. But Mr. Hout felt himself to be playing the innings of his lifetime, and heeded neither bruises nor sarcasms. At last he pulled a full pitch into his wickets, and retired for eleven, the value of his innings being lessened by the fact that at its termination he flung down the bat on the pitch, and point securing it, five runs were credited to the fielding side.

This five-run penalty for flinging down the bat was universal in the practice-ground, point being kept in very close for the express purpose of pouncing upon it. It had happened, when the bowling was very deadly and the batsmen specially

irascible, that a side had been beaten before its opponents went to the wickets.

Walter kept up his end, carrying out his bat for thirty-three. Needless to say, the "Clarence Amateurs" were decisively beaten. Mr. Hout took no part in the latter stages of the game, having obtained a place in a railwaymen's match, where there was cricket of a higher class, and a small cask of beer beside the scorer.

Walter was a little disappointed with his first Press notice. It said that the "Duke of Wellington" had beaten the "Clarence Amateurs" owing to the good batting of Walter Tyrell and the good fielding of Reginald Cook. There seemed a lack of proportion in bracketing the preparatory boy's baby catches at point with such a feat as making thirty-three not out. But he bought a copy of the *North London Sentinel* and left it lying about conspicuously. Of course, every one in the house picked up the paper and glanced at it; but equally as a matter of course, no one noticed what he wished them to. In the end, he had to act

as his own showman. His father and Max (very oddly) regarded the episode, and the *Sentinel's* comment, as funny.

"What bowling it must have been!" said Mr. Tyrell, throwing up his hands. Walter modestly tried to suggest that the attack had been very deadly, but his father persisted in his strange attitude.

Claude and Margaret were the only ones to see the matter in the proper light. The little girl spent one of her pennies on another copy of the *Sentinel,* and put it away among her treasures.

"Didn't you want to run away when they were bowling at you so swiftly?" she asked.

Walter had the grace to feel ashamed of himself. He did not mean to tell lies; but when he was relating anything, he always hoped that from his true statements his hearers were receiving impressions that went beyond the truth.

During the ensuing summer the *North London Sentinel* was often moved to admiration by the cricketing performances of Walter Tyrell. Once

it called attention to him editorially, in a paragraph dealing with bowling performances of the week. The feats thus immortalized were taken impartially from first-class cricket reports, and from the scores contributed exclusively to the *Sentinel's* own columns. It is surprising what a poor figure the first-class bowlers cut.

There was no organized cricket in connexion with the great City school, and probably these park games, with all their absurdities, were better for Walter than the half-grudged innings he would have been allowed with his elder brother's friends. He certainly acquired the good habit of going to the wicket expecting to score. He must have made nearly half the runs for his club that came from the bat. Admirers called him "The Ranjitsinhji of the 'Duke of Wellington.'" Positively I think Max and Mr. Tyrell dismissed his successes too lightly.

The club was successful beyond all precedent. There was only one fly in the ointment; but that was a large one—Mr. Hout. Every week did that

old International become a greater nuisance. It was not alone that his cheating invariably caused unpleasantness with the opposing side. Unfair as a batsman, he was more unprincipled as a wicket-keeper; and he kept other material as well. He was for ever borrowing things to take home, and they never came back. And he spoke so fiercely when the boys—in the most considerate manner, for they were dreadfully afraid of hurting his feelings—jogged his memory. He pulled at his whiskers in a way that frightened the younger children into fits.

"Did they think he wanted to steal their miserable stumps?" he roared.

They tried to dodge him; but wherever they pitched their wicket, he discovered them.

Things were in this most unsatisfactory state when the match of the season, between the "Duke of Wellington" and the dame's school from which, two years before, it had emanated, was played. Miss Kingsford, the dearest of maiden ladies, provided unlimited ginger-beer and cakes and buns.

He flung himself upon the scene while the room was eating. He was in his most truculent humour and more than half drunk. He cursed Reggie for trying to shunt him and spoke darkly about the conspiracy that had driven him from first-class cricket pursuing him still. He insisted upon a place in the team, and when this was granted refused to work, seated himself upon the chairs, rioted with the provisions, and threw half-emptied ginger-beer bottles at players he suspected of slackness in the field. He went away for a time, and during his absence, Mr. Gange, the preparatory-master, mounted up and consented to act as umpire. Taking his stand, he seemed to become another man—brisker and more self-reliant. Mr. Gange, although practice-ground *habitués* might not know it, was an ardent follower of the game. The destination of the Clarence Park Cup was his chief interest in life. Only last winter he had won, by examination, a diploma that gave him the right to umpire in matches for the trophy. So well did he acquit himself in this position that it was rumoured

he had been appointed one of the umpires in the all-important final.

Mr. Hout returned during the interval, and when the "Duke of Wellington" went in, he took first ball. It was a perfectly fair trickle (the word "sneak" suggests something too venomous and subtle to be appropriate), and was stopped by Mr. Hout's foot. Unimpeded, it would certainly have hit the wicket, but whether it had sufficient force to dislodge a bail is a nice point that umpires (fortunately) have not to consider. The boy umpire thought that it was out, and said so, but Mr. Hout argued that to pitch straight it is necessary for a ball to pitch, and refused to budge. Mr. Gange turned very red, but his colleague letting the matter pass, he said nothing. Shortly afterwards a l.b.w. appeal against the Colonial was made to him.

"Out!" he replied promptly.

This time the batsman used another argument. He said that the ball had struck his right foot. Now, you could only be out leg-before for obstruct-

ing with the left. The right foot was called the pivot foot, and could be put where the batsman liked; otherwise how could he cut? Now, Dr. Grace——

"I said 'Out,'" remarked Mr. Gange dangerously.

"I 'eard you; but as you don't seem to understand the business, I am trying to teach it you."

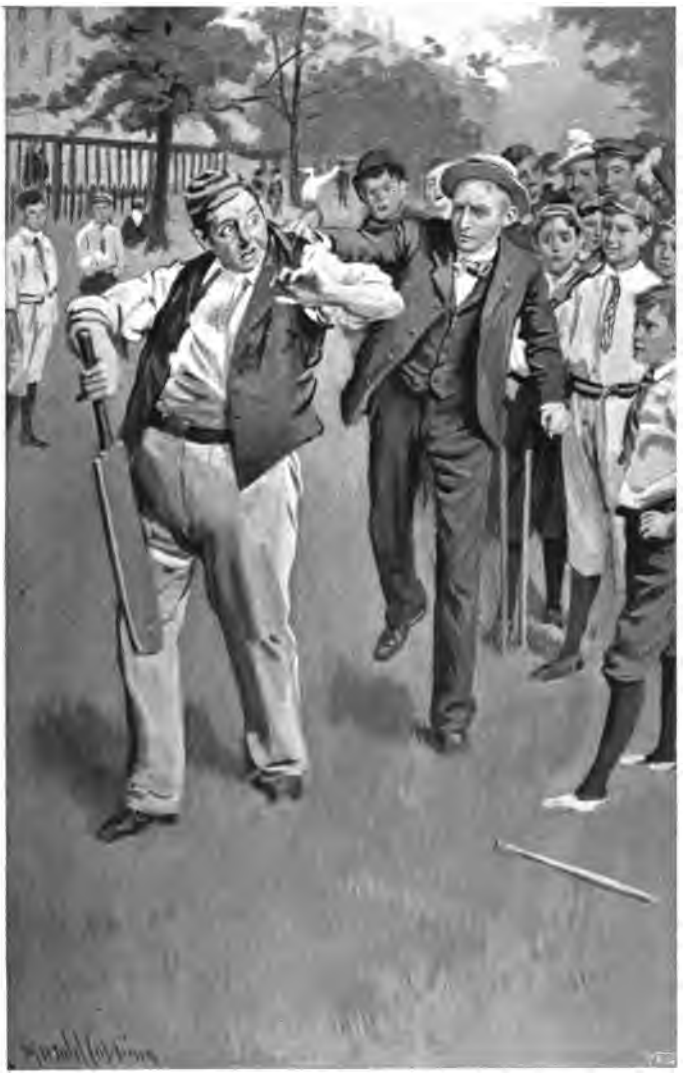
"What's that?"

The despised preparatory-master marched towards the offender with a stride that would not have disgraced Dr. Smart, the head-master himself.

This pimple-faced, moonish, eyelashless young man, inspired by outraged pride of umpirehood, and by a genuine passion for cricket and fair play, had become a portent, splendidly threatening.

"Take yourself off, now," he said, "before you have cause to regret it!"

"I am going on with my innings, and all the (adjectived) cheats in the park won't stop me. If



"HE SEIZED HIM BY THE COLLAR, AND KICKED HIM OFF THE FIELD OF PLAY."

you give me any more of your (expletived) lip, I will break your (emphasized) jaw!"

Mr. Gange plucked up a stump and brought it down across the bully's shoulders.

Mr. Hout burst into foul language, and the stump descended again.

"You dare not put up your dukes, like a man," he whimpered.

Mr. Gange threw away the stump and boxed his ears. And then, seeing that there was no fight in the man, he seized him by the collar and kicked him off the field of play.

"Use your pivot foot to him, master!" a humorist shouted.

A crowd had gathered during the quarrel, and opinions had been dangerously divided, but this cry determined the direction of their sympathies.

"Kicks don't count with the pivot foot!" the roughs shouted.

Directly Mr. Hout could escape, he fled like a dog with a kettle tied to its tail. He never troubled the club again.

Mr. Gange stood, his breath coming in quick pants, and his face in patches of red and white.

"The scoundrel questioned my right to umpire!" he repeated.

One of the crowd had seen Mr. Gange in more imposing surroundings.

"You're good enough for the Cup matches," he said, "and I've bin told they don't 'ave the *worst* umpires in England for them. Pity if you don't know enough for a paltry game like this!"

At the conclusion of the play, Walter apologized to Mr. Gange for his conduct in the detention-room. In the glow of admiration for Mr. Gange's courage he did more than justice to the latter's motives for sparing him. The fact was, Mr. Gange took no pride in his schoolmastering.

Walter told the story at home, and Max determined that Mr. Gange should be rewarded. It was the privilege of the class to which he had attained to be exempt from detentions, a German master alone contesting this right. Habitually the latter made out detention papers for Fifth Form

boys, which they, as regularly, declined to accept. The next time he did this, his victims—six in number—astonished him by taking them without a word, Max having persuaded them for a generous object, to sink their dignity.

The detention-room had never witnessed such high company.

Of course, Fifth Form boys could not really think a preparatory-master their equal, but you would not have gathered this from their conduct. They stood in a row, with their backs to the empty fireplace, and one or other of them was talking to Mr. Gange all the time.

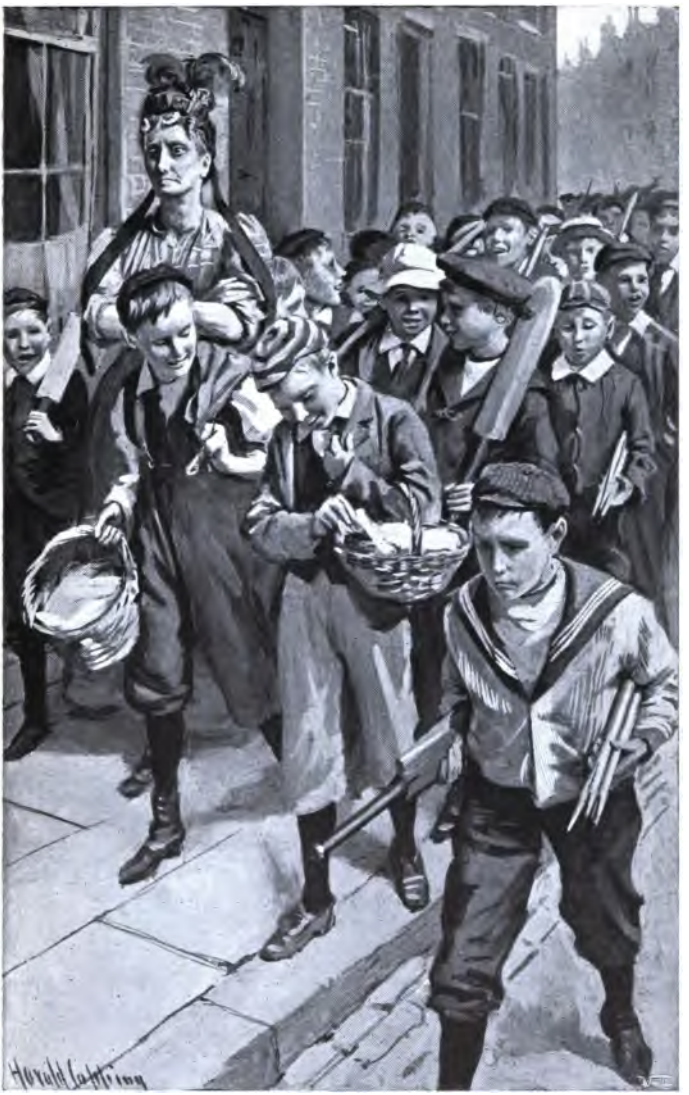
"Poor Gange seemed jolly nervous while we were speaking to him," said Max afterwards, "but I expect it has done him a heap of good with his boys."

mustard to each to keep the eaters' thoughts from wandering.

"You'll want somethink to keep you up," she said.

The Rabbit dressed and went down to breakfast on the first floor. Mr. Peters was in bed snoring, and his wife continued her sandwich-cutting, working like the entire Mission staff at a parents' tea. She presented an odd appearance. Her costume suggested every season of the year and every period of the day, and her eloquence, whether she was protesting her resolve to stand by Bill, or exhorting her sons to obey the Rabbit that day implicitly, was worthy of her garb. There were large, waving words as gorgeously inappropriate as her new bonnet, and others as homely and as abbreviated as her flannel petticoat.

When they were ready to start and the Rabbit opened the front door, he was surprised at the number of helpers. Altogether nearly seventy small boys followed him. Mrs. Peters was actually at the head of the procession as far as the end



"MRS. PETERS WAS ACTUALLY AT THE HEAD OF THE PROCESSION."

of Bempton Street, her plumes and petticoats giving her somewhat the appearance of a drum-major in a Highland regiment.

Reaching Trafalgar Road, Roger turned to the right, and they walked for a mile until they reached the delta into which the Trafalgar Road flows to lose its identity. It was now definitely announced that the objective was Clarence Park. A hundred yards from the park gates Roger halted his forces, and went on ahead by himself to reconnoitre. It was well that he did so. A dozen boys, much bigger than the Bempton Street boys, were against the railings. Unless he could manage to supplant these, his forces might as well return home. The Rabbit made his plans quickly. A considerable minority of his party had reached the dignity of trousers. Bats and stumps were concealed down trouser-legs, the youngsters marched past the park gates quite unconcernedly, the big boys (if they gave them a thought) taking them for a cripple academy out for a very early walk. The only one at all interested in the park was the

Rabbit. He ran back and addressed the big boys: "Hello, mates! what have you got in there?"

"Clarence Park."

"Let's have a look."

They made way for him. His enthusiasm was remarkable, and he shouted to his friends to join him. A swarm of little boys in knickerbockers ran back eagerly, and a smaller number in trousers limped stiffly after them.

"Come right up to the rails; these mates will let you."

The big boys stood back. The new-comers could not tear themselves from the sights, and they would not allow others to perform this operation for them. Stumps and bats (whence produced, goodness knows!) were raised menacingly.

"Don't push!" said the Rabbit when the park-keeper came in sight. "There is room inside for us all."

The big boys howled with wrath and anguish.

"We can race these little cheats to the pitches," said one that kept his head.

But when the gates had been opened, and twenty little boys had pushed through, there occurred a regrettable block, and the gate, in some never explained way, got closed. Before the first of the big boys reached the practice-ground, Roger Ford had worked his will. It is hard to see how he could have done better.

On the Clarence Park practice-ground there are four pitches universally coveted, as much for their intrinsic excellence (there is not a blade of grass upon any of them) as for their closeness to the roadway and the public eye. Of these the Bempton Street boys had secured three. The park-keeper had reserved the other—an illegal act, but he was a keen sportsman, and could not resist a bribe of five shillings from the two best clubs on this side of the park. It was a grand wicket, but it suffered from a serious disadvantage. On three sides there were bare patches very close to it, and in Clarence Park absence of grass constitutes a wicket, and all wickets may be played on at once. The Rabbit devoted seventeen of his band, divided

into five distinct games, to making play impossible on this reserved pitch. Twenty more boys were absorbed by the three other good pitches, and with his remaining followers fourteen more games were started in less advantageous positions.

And now came the tedious part of the business —keeping up a semblance of play from seven o'clock in the morning until the afternoon. The park-keeper wanted to dispossess one party that he found fast asleep, but they argued that it was an interval between the innings, and there was no rule against spending it thus.

About half-past two the clubs began to arrive. They offered the Bempton Street boys a shilling for a pitch, and a half-crown each for the three superior ones. The boys, playing now, with immense zest, refused to deal. They had come for a full day's cricket. By three o'clock an angry mob of cricketers, boys and men, had gathered, and their material was heaped up on the roadway. No one seemed to know what to do until a pompous,

short-winded gentleman with side whiskers arrived and took the lead.

"Can't play? Nonsense! we must play. It is of importance to society that my lads should not lose their game."

He carried a cricket set done up in pads under his arm, and was attended by a dozen young roughs.

"I will arrange this for you all."

He walked across and tackled one of the young Peters.

"Look here, you and the other children must play together—a regular match, you know, fifteen or twenty a side."

"Don't want to play twenty a side?"

"Well, you must do something of the kind. Those little boys in the next pitch, for example, would be glad to play with you."

"My muvver would beat me if I played with kids like them."

Not knowing that the boys in question were the speaker's brothers, the gentleman lost the joke,

and the laughter that followed angered him. He tried other groups, but they all refused to coalesce.

While the gentlemen were employed thus, the Rabbit was influencing public opinion against him. His great weapon was his adversary's obvious prosperity.

"He is rich, and he doesn't want us on the park because we are poor. He don't own the park."

Even men who were being kept from their play admitted that there was much in this argument.

"Why don't you pay down your money and belong to a club with a ground of its own? You look as if you could afford it," said a bricklayer to the stout gentleman.

Obviously it would not be safe to eject the youngsters.

"It is no good," the gentleman said; "the letter of the law is upon their side. We must make the best bargains we can."

In his own case this was not a particularly good one. He wanted the second best pitch (the Rab-

bit himself was guarding this), and it cost him a sovereign.

Roger hurried off to strengthen his followers, whose games were making a start on the reserved wicket impossible. He had not been playing five minutes when the secretary of the "Victoria Nyanza," one of the leading men's clubs on the park, approached. The secretary linked his arm affectionately through Roger's and led him aside.

"My dear lad" (he was of that type of philanthropists that addresses boys as "dear lads"). "I sympathize with your stand entirely. You have as much right to the park as I have. Now, my club is very anxious to play this match to-day with the "Connaught." It is the match of the season, as neither club have yet been beaten. We can't begin with you little fellows swarming around us. Now, I ask you, as a favour to me, to take five shillings between the whole lot of you to go right away."

"Make it a sovereign, and I'll speak to them."

The secretary hurried back to the roadway bursting with passion.

"It's the boy's beastly temper!" he spluttered. "But he shan't defy me. We will start playing; and if these children are too close to us, that is their concern."

This seemed a good notion. "The Victoria Nyanza" won the toss, and sent to the wickets their secretary and vice-captain—a humane arrangement in the circumstances, for neither of them would (on principle) hit a straight ball, or could hit any other. But the vice-captain was of the build that leads to legbyes, while the secretary, owing to inability to use the middle of his bat, sometimes edged balls through the slips. He called this cutting. This favourite and only stroke he brought off in the first over, and the ball struck one of the Bempton Street boys, who was batting where short-slip should have stood, upon the ankle. The child sobbed loudly. Roger led his stricken follower to the roadway. The great match was stopped, and the secretary attempted condolence.

"They did it a-purpose!" screamed Roger. "I heard them say they was going to hurt us."

An ugly murmur arose from the crowd.

"If you want to stop the kids' play, why don't you give them a trifle, like men, not try to kill them."

The "Victoria Nyanza" was glad to come to terms. A sovereign seemed a large sum, but, after all, it worked out at less than a shilling a player.

After that the end came suddenly. The Rabbit's object became known, and he was made a popular favourite. Haggling about his terms was considered heartless, and people that did not want to play gave him money. The gentleman with the side whiskers was particularly interested, and he directed one of the keepers (who seemed to know him and stand in great awe) to ascertain the small hero's name and address.

When Roger Ford counted his takings, he found that they amounted to six pounds fifteen shillings. The odd shillings he distributed among his supporters, many of whom had brought nothing with them, and were half-famished. They hurried off to the refreshment-room, and did not

return. Roger remained. Walter Tyrell's club was playing a match against the stout gentleman's contingent (on the pitch that had cost a sovereign), and the Rabbit wanted to ask his friend not to say anything at home about Bill's trouble. And there was nothing to take him away. Bill's case, he had heard, was adjourned until Monday. The Young Peters stopped with him, not altogether to his delight. Walter Tyrell was batting, apparently not meaning to get out.

The Rabbit and his friends sat down to watch, close to short-leg, who was none other than their old adversary, the gentleman with the side whiskers. He had donned a crimson cricket-cap, and the boys called him the red donkey. At first it was "the donkey in the red cap," but this was cumbersome, and they shortened it to "the red donkey." In their defence it must be stated that he had done them a grievous wrong by missing an easy catch.

"Butter-fingers!" cried the little Peters wrathfully.

"The sun was right in my eyes," said the gentleman.

"Don't make excuses," said the Rabbit.

Walter Tyrell stopped in a long while, and made seventeen runs, but the others did little.

In the interval, the gentleman sold sherbet at a farthing a glass, supplying the water from a large urn, at which rate he calculated that the venture would be self-supporting. He attached great importance to this. His lads were not being pauperized; they could drink their sherbet and look the world in the face afterwards. Looking people in the face, however, was not a habit of theirs. A more shifty, unpromising lot of young roughs (their ages ranged from twelve to sixteen) one rarely sees. All of them had been in trouble, and they suspected every one they met of knowing this. They drank in the same way they played cricket, without enthusiasm, but with more capacity. So that his venture should not wear any appearance of being done for charity, the gentle-

man sold his sherbet to any one that came up and demanded it.

"Four," said Roger, laying down a penny.

The gentleman took a glass three-parts full of water, and dipped a dessert-spoon into his sherbet tin.

"That's not a glassful," said the Rabbit.

"It will be up to the top when the sherbet effervesces. You don't want it spilling down your coat."

"Then give it to us in two goes."

The gentleman repudiated the suggestion. If he increased the farthing's worth, his scheme ceased to be self-supporting, and every glass drunk would lessen the lower classes' self-reliance and self-respect.

The boys had to give way (the custom of merchants was all against them), but they let it be seen that they regarded themselves as the victims of sharp practice.

Roger had a few words of conversation with Walter Tyrell, and then he and his friends started

for home. When they were at a safe distance, Sam Peters turned round and shouted back at the gentleman, including his cap, his catching, his person, his side whiskers, and his sherbet in one vast comprehensive insult.

At nine o'clock that evening, Roger was in his attic, sitting alone in the dark. It is hardly fair to inquire what he was doing. He was but a little chap, remember; and if he generally forgot this, and made other people forget it, he was conscious of the fact now. And Bill, who was so fond of company, what were his thoughts alone in his cell? In the excitement of doing something for his friend, the child had scarcely realized the full pitifulness of the latter's fate. And now the reaction after the day's triumph showed him the facts blacker even than they really were.

His bitter meditations were disturbed by a man's footsteps upon the staircase. A child's fear of robbers gripped him; and he looked round nervously to the hiding-place of his six pounds. He hastily lit the candle, and as he did so the door

opened and in walked the gentleman with the side whiskers.

"Is your name Roger Ford?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! you are the little boy, if I am not mistaken, that called me 'Butter-fingers' and the 'Red Donkey.' 'Butter-fingers,' although in this instance most unjust, I do not object to—a spectator has an admitted right to say 'Butter-fingers;' but 'Donkey' is actionable."

The Rabbit handed his guest a chair. He had never been in the least degree afraid of this man.

"Perhaps if you had known my name, you would have been more respectful. I am Mr. Bone, magistrate of the Mare Street police-court. I had William Dudfield before me this morning, and had to adjourn his case until Monday, owing to the indisposition of the prosecutor."

"I know. Oh! let him off, sir! Let Bill off! You don't know how decent he is."

"There is nothing," said the magistrate, "to

connect him with the theft, or his position would be even more serious than it is."

"Please let him off, sir. Do it for six pounds. It's all I've got. No one would give more for Bill than me."

It may be remarked that the boy's ideas about police-court procedure were vague.

Mr. Bone took out a large note-book.

"If I understand your appeal aright, it is based on the prisoner's previous good character. Kindly acquaint me with the particulars of your own connexion with William Dudfield."

"When we come here, mother and me, I was quite a little chap, and Bill used to meet me in the court and tease me and make me cry."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, making a note.

"When mother was out, sometimes he come up here after me. One day he come up when mother and me was playing. Her hair had come down, and I was trying to stop her from putting it up. You know, mother wasn't like a mother. She was pretty, you know—more like a girl."

"I understand."

"Bill stood in the door watching; we didn't see him, and then he arsted mother to play with him, too, and she did, and give him some dinner afterwards. He never got enough to eat at home, and mother said we shouldn't be any poorer for feeding him. Then one day his mother ran away, and he come up and stopped with us."

"And then your mother died?"

The child nodded.

"She was ill, but I never knew she was dying. Her eyes were open all the time, and she could talk, and sometimes she would laugh when me and Bill was doing things for her. And then a gentleman come from the Mission—not Mr. Sampson, but one we didn't like. I kept running to mother to show her things I was drawing, and the gentleman wanted me turned out of the room, because, he said, mother was losing her last chance. But mother said I had only her to talk to, and must not be hurried, because it made me stammer. And then all of a sudden she turned towards me and

stretched out her arms; and when I run to her, she was dead."

Mr. Bone, of Mare Street, wiped his spectacles.

"This evidence," he said, but more as if talking to himself, "is almost entirely irrelevant. And what happened afterwards?"

"We jest kept on here. No one interfered with us. We got a little money from a sick club, and Bill went out selling papers. Oh, sir, let him off! You don't know how good he has been to me. Mrs. Peters, on the first floor, will tell you."

"Send for Mrs. Peters," said the magistrate.

Mrs. Peters arrived, shaking and bobbing, and carrying a two-year-old little girl in her arms.

"Please tell me in a few words what you know about William Dudfield?"

"Bill——" began the woman, but the baby interrupted her.

"Bill made me a dolly, so big!"

She stretched her arms wide—really an absurd size for a doll.

"The last witness's evidence is unreliable," said Mr. Bone sternly.

Mrs. Peters drew a character sketch of Bill that was pure eulogy, and the magistrate accepted her testimony with reservations.

"Very well," he said, closing his book. "I need not trouble you any more."

When Mrs. Peters had gone, Mr. Bone took up his hat, and the small boy's also. He clapped the latter on Roger's head.

"You are coming with me," he said. "You are too young to be quite alone, and I am too old. We will have a pleasant Sunday together, and on Monday morning we will see what can be done for Bill."

* * * * * * *

On Monday morning, Mr. Bone, at the Mare Street police-court, availing himself of the First Offenders' Act, released William Dudfield after severely reprimanding him, binding him over in the sum of six pounds to come up for judgment if called upon. The prisoner stepped down into the

court. A small boy went up to him shyly, and the two left the court hand in hand. Mr Bone gazed after them dreamily. He saw the elder boy a regular member of his Saturday Club, gaining true manliness at cricket and football, and a confirmed consumer of ennobling drinks.

A Favourite of Fortune

TO the rule that we undervalue what comes to us free of expense, there is an exception in the case of relatives, and Mr. Tyrell never thought better of his wife's brother than when he advised that he was returning home by P. and O. steamer at his own charges. In the past, Richard Stoneman had often talked of returning to England, but always with the proviso that his brother-in-law should furnish the means. On receiving one of these appeals, Mr. Tyrell would reply in a strain of optimism that must have come to the exile like a breath of ozone—so sanguine was the writer that if Dick but remained in Australia, his eventual success was assured. This periodical encouragement, combined with the absence of remittances, had had much to do with keeping Stoneman in the Antipodes.

And now the news came that Dick (poor Dick!

as they had been wont to call him) had made money, and was coming home to spend it. Mr. Tyrell was honestly glad to hear it, for he had never had any complaint to make against his wife's brother beyond chronic hard-uppishness, but he expressed rather more surprise than was consistent with his prophecies.

"How your brother can have made the money," he said to his wife at the breakfast table, "I cannot imagine, and perhaps it would be better not to inquire."

It was in his mind that Dick must have engaged in some reckless speculation, justified neither by his means nor by the information before him when he made the plunge. But the boys could not read their father's thoughts, and Walter put the darkest interpretation upon the speech. He did not really, but it thrilled him to think that the words would bear such a reading. After breakfast he drew Claude on one side.

"You heard what the pater said; you know, I suppose, how money *is* made in Australia?"

"Cattle and wool," said Claude slowly, "and gold. Oh, Walter! might Uncle Dick have been a gold-digger?"

"No," said Walter, "he mightn't, or there would be no reason why we shouldn't inquire. It is something that is a great disgrace to us," (he looked as little like one conscious of disgrace as might be)—"it is bushranging."

"Oh, rats!" said Claude.

"Why, rats? There are such people as bushrangers, I suppose?"

"Yes, but boys like us don't have bushrangers for uncles."

"That is just where you are jolly well wrong. Some bushrangers come from better families than ours. There is a story that ran in *Soft Things;* the hero is called Lieutenant Limelight. He had lived in an ancestral home until he was ousted by a scheming cousin, called Jasper. It was this, and other things that made him take up bushranging."

"Well, I am certain we couldn't have an uncle a bushranger."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I *am* certain. You can't stuff me up. You can stuff yourself up if you like."

"Cheeky kid!" said Walter. "If you got what you deserved, I should smack your head."

But this part of a brother's duty went undischarged, the only result of the discussion being that Walter, in sheer obstinacy, began to fancy that there really might be something in his theory —a bare possibility of truth, at any rate.

In due season Uncle Dick arrived, in the best of health and spirits, and in his best clothes. He might have been on his way to a garden party. Unlike the Tyrell men, who looked best in overcoats, he could wear clothes, and his nephew's first judgment was that here was a relation who would do them credit. The boys went to a City school, travelling to and fro by train, and the tragedies of their lives occurred when relations or family friends blundered into compartments wherein they were riding with their schoolfellows. Max was particularly exigent in the matter of relatives;

indeed, in the whole circle there was not one that reached his standard. Some were ugly, or of too generous build, while those of creditable physique broke down on the point of costume, for it is a strange fact that however contentedly slovenly a lad may be himself, he cannot look his fellows in their grubby little faces if convicted of owning an adult relative guilty in dress of the most trifling solecism. Knowing that he would be expected to take his uncle about, Max had anticipated his arrival with some dismay. Coming from the Colonies, it was likely that the visitor would dress unconventionally. Max was not disposed to condemn him for this, but he doubted if he could persuade his schoolfellows to take the same tolerant view. He made the attempt, however, and succeeded beyond his hopes. In a Colonial the boys thought this free-and-easiness characteristic and praise-worthy.

"I dare say Uncle Dick won't ever wear decent hats or gloves."

"And why should he?"

"Perhaps," said Max, anxious whilst his friends were in this complacent mood to get them committed irrevocably, "perhaps he won't even wear a collar."

"That is the sort of a man that England wants."

"I dare say," said Max, "he may not be quite so clean as some of your uncles."

He was relieved to find that even this trait would be counted for righteousness. The modern craze for washing could so easily be overdone. Max breathed more freely. It was scarcely possible that in slovenliness his uncle could go beyond what had been thus condoned in advance. But the boys did more. They made a hero of the unknown, and Tyrell's uncle became a type to them of all that was freest and best in Colonial manhood.

"That would not suit Tyrell's uncle," they would say, when they saw a man over-dressed.

They wanted to hear how such an ideal being earned his bread. Max kept to generalities. Riding about the bush in stained riding-breeches and

a flannel shirt seemed the principal thing. If he had suggested a bank or an office, his schoolfellows would have lynched him.

Until he saw his uncle, Max did not realize how he had allowed the legend to grow. Now he saw it in a flash, and the ridicule he must suffer when the boys learned that it had no foundation. He would keep the truth from them if he could, but even at that it was maddening to think that the irreproachable had arrived, the relation he had been seeking for years, and that, owing to his own foolish tongue, the paragon must be concealed like an overstout aunt.

Walter, too, was vexed with his uncle, but for another reason. He had looked for a "dude," with an absurd eyeglass, who said "vewy," and was scared by horses, dogs, and firearms, for it was under such disguise that "Lieutenant Limelight" had been wont to hide his terrifying personality. But this was forgotten in the surprise of hearing his belief confirmed—it was characteristic of Walter to be surprised when this happened.

"You have not told us yet, Dick, how you made your money?" said Mrs. Tyrell.

Her brother evaded the question, but a duller boy than Walter Tyrell would have noticed his embarrassment.

"In *Soft Things,*" said Walter, "there is a piece called 'Fifty Ways of Making a Fortune in the Colonies.' "

Mr. Stoneman looked at him sharply. "And how long have you been a reader of *Soft Things?*" he asked.

"I began when 'Lieutenant Limelight, the Australian Duval' started."

"Ah!" said the man, "that would be about a year ago."

He looked at Walter fixedly. Not a muscle of his face moved, but the boy felt his uncle was demanding a private interview. He followed him to the spare bedroom.

The man closed the door.

"And so you read *Soft Things,* and know how I made my money?"

"Yes," said Walter nervously. Downstairs seemed very far away.

"And was it one of the fifty ways?"

The boy shook his head.

"In another part of the paper, eh?"

"I am the only one that read it," said Walter, "and I won't tell any one."

"That's a good little chap. Of course, it doesn't really matter; I have done nothing to be ashamed of, but I would sooner that your father and mother did not know."

On thinking them over, there was something in his uncle's remarks that Walter did not like. The assertion that there was nothing in his calling for regret was contrary to the best traditions. All the outlaws he had read about, from "Lieutenant Limelight" downwards, had been wont to refer to their crimes sadly, relating them, on occasion, in detail, with gusto tempered by remorse. There are stories that glorify crime, penny dreadfuls and the like, but Walter had never read such. His knowledge was all derived from tales of good

"DOWNSTAIRS SEEMED VERY FAR AWAY."

moral tone, by authors of standing, printed (when in book form) upon good paper, wherein right is right and wrong is wrong, and no excuse is accepted for criminal courses unless the perpetrator has been ruined by a sleek rascal, or some heartless woman has jilted him, thus depriving him of faith in humanity and releasing him from all moral obligations. And even then, so hyper-self-critical are fine minds, these romantic scoundrels were not free from remorse. But Uncle Dick was without this noble trait. Might it be that he was a criminal of another class, just simply a bad man, with no justification for his misdoings?

Walter devoted himself to solving this problem. He tried his uncle at various times on the subject of women, but could evoke no outbursts of hate and scorn. Dreadful to relate, Richard Stoneman seemed to think rather highly of women. The boy was disappointed, but he gave his uncle another chance.

"Don't you hate society, uncle?" he asked. No,

the fact that Uncle Dick showed a preference for his society, mentally associating Max with dull walks, owing to the fact that the elder boy kept him to back streets, where there was small likelihood of their meeting the fellows. Walter was more catholic. Byways must be investigated if one was to know now how to baffle a hue and cry, but great thoroughfares had their uses also. Particularly was Walter careful to point out the big shops that had entrances into two streets, and to show how these might be used for shaking off a spy. Starting for a walk, he liked to do so by the back garden, and then down the little lane, and he made his uncle observe how by trespassing across a strip of nursery garden one could reach the heath, a splendid means of escape supposing the police had come for one by the front door.

Mr. Stoneman thought that his nephew's mind must be unsettled by bad books, and he tried to give him juster ideas.

"You talk about nothing but escaping from the police. Are you thinking of becoming a thief?"

Walter saw a chance of driving home a moral.

"Thieves," he said, "are no worse than bushrangers!"

"Bushrangers! I can tell you something about them. They are the wickedest and most miserable creatures upon God's earth."

His self-condemnation was terrible to witness.

"A bushranger can do a lot of good," said Claude, who had just joined them, "if he only robs banks and things, and gives money for rent to widows, so that they won't be turned out of their houses."

"Do shut up, Claude. You know nothing whatever about it."

"Why, you told me that yourself, Walter. The best bushrangers do it, anyway, and they risk their lives to save ladies from insult."

"Oh, Claude! You don't know what harm you are doing."

"I know exactly what it is. You want to keep uncle all to yourself, and you don't like me to

speak to him. Uncle Dick likes me quite as much as he does you, and he would just as soon talk to me."

Mr. Stoneman good-humouredly busied himself to make peace between the two brothers. But he was quite at his ease again. His remorse had vanished. Claude's unfortunate remarks had put back the cause of reform indefinitely.

But Walter was not relying solely, or indeed, chiefly upon his own arguments. He had upon his side a hundred philanthropists. Until one's attention is drawn to it, one has no conception of the number and variety of leaflets distributed in the streets gratuitously. Quite a proportion of the people you brush past would have bestowed a tract upon you, had you given them the chance. Walter saw to it that his uncle accepted these opportunities. The boy did not say anything. He simply forced tracts upon his companion as a conjurer can force cards. Unfortunately they were never quite relevant. There were appeals to moderate and to immoderate drinkers, leaflets of "The Sabbath

Observance Society" and "The Sunday League," "Anti-Gambling Statistics," and "Words to Flesh Eaters." But no moralist seemed to concern himself with cases like Uncle Dick's. As for having words with armed robbers, it seemed to be the last thing that any one contemplated. But something was gained if only the habit were formed in the man of accepting all the printed matter that came his way. The right tract would be offered some day. Of course, this involved much waste of time upon mere advertisements. With a touch of unconscious pharisaism, Walter never accepted a leaflet for himself. One having been offered and taken, he would stand aloof and watch with a reformer's eye his uncle read what was, perhaps, an apocryphal description of some tradesman's ten-and-sixpenny boots.

In the same way Walter would not pass any open-air gatherings. Thus it took them two hours to get through Regent's Park one Sunday afternoon when oratory was in flower. Walter would get his uncle into a little throng and then back out.

Mr. Stoneman listened respectfully to a small, unshaven man demonstrating the flatness of the earth, the boy with a you-listen-to-that-my-young-friend-it-will-do-you-good expression of face watching him from the gravel roadway. The man thought that the youngster was trying to give him an insight into London life, and although all this was not new to him, yet after being away from it so long he found it fairly interesting.

To Walter the most exciting event during this period was his catching Uncle Dick turning over the back numbers of *Soft Things*. With a glance round to assure himself he was unobserved (Walter, one regrets to state, was spying through the crack of the door), he selected three numbers and tore them carefully into fragments. At once there flashed upon the boy's mind the words "Founded upon facts." Were the chapters of "Lieutenant Limelight" thus destroyed drawn from incidents in Uncle Dick's career? The boy hoped to learn this when he had brought his senior to a right frame of mind, and he looked forward to listening

with regret to confessions of crimes of preternatural ingenuity and daring.

Of course, Walter was not allowed to monopolize the visitor. The cloistered walks with Max were not abandoned entirely, and it was during one of these that the blow fell. It happened upon a Wednesday half-holiday, but Walter was not told until the following afternoon. He had been kept in, and thus was later home than his brother. Max opened the door to him.

"Have you heard anything about uncle—anything connected with *Soft Things?*"

"I have known it all along," Walter replied.

"Well," said Max, "I only heard it to-day, but every boy in the school will know by the end of the week!"

"However did it come out?"

"It is all that pig Latzarus. You know how close I have been keeping Uncle Dick. Well, yesterday afternoon young Latzarus met us. I pretended not to recognize him, but I could see he had twigged me. He managed to meet us again, and

this time he took a good stare. The little beast spotted uncle as the man in *Soft Things,* but he had destroyed the back numbers, so what does he do in the half-hour but go round to *Soft Things* office and have them turned up! And then when he had made sure, he had the cheek to see the editor, tell him where uncle was staying, and they are sending a man round this evening."

"Have you got uncle safely out of the way?"

"I haven't told him."

"Do you mean to say that you have loafed about for two hours and done nothing? Oh, you great idiot! Where is uncle? I must see him this minute."

"He is working in the garden."

Max was so taken aback by the vehemence of the attack upon him that he answered quite meekly.

Walter rushed through the house and found his uncle planting seeds. Breathlessly he panted out his story. The young man was visibly annoyed.

"But I suppose it was bound to come out sooner or later," he said, and went on planting seeds.

"Oh, don't delay, uncle! Get away while it is still possible—out by the back, the way I showed you."

"So I am to give them the slip, eh? Well it doesn't seem a bad notion. Tell Mary, when the man comes, to keep him waiting a bit, and I will get out into the lane. Then she can say truthfully that I am not at home."

"Oh, uncle, do go this very minute!"

"Why, he may not come for an hour, and I shall miss my tea. No, thank you."

It was with just such nonchalance that "Lieutenant Limelight" had faced his perils, but Walter was not pleased. He stamped with impatience. He was learning that the same things affect one differently in books and in real life. Mr. Stoneman would not be bustled; and when the tea-bell rang, he went in and began what promised to be a hearty meal.

But in the middle a strange knock came at the

front door. Mr. Stoneman whispered a word to the maid and slipped out. He was gone without a word of farewell, and they might never see him again!

The knock was repeated four times before the door was opened, and then the servant was some time before she returned. She brought a letter with her.

"If you please, ma'am, it was a gentleman for Mr. Stoneman. I told him Mr. Stoneman was out, and he left this note."

"Is the coast clear?" said a voice at the door, and Mr. Stoneman entered.

"Oh! why didn't you get clear away?" said Walter. "They will come back."

"That is just what this note says; and when they come, I must see them."

"You won't let yourself be taken?" cried Walter.

"It is a bore, but it happened to me before."

Walter put his face down on the tablecloth and sobbed.

"Perhaps, Dick," said Mrs. Tyrell a little sharply, "you will explain what all this means?"

"I will explain my own share, Annie, willingly; but I have not the least notion why Walter should cry."

"Of course, it is hardest on me," said Max.

"What I do know," said Uncle Dick, "is that *Soft Things* has been told I am in England, and the editor says I must be interviewed."

"Why?"

"Because I am the winner of their mammoth prize."

"I know," said Walter, looking up and smiling through his tears; "the top-hat prize."

"Yes; Walter knew it from the first, and very well he kept the secret. And now for detail. Twelve months ago, *Soft Things,* that now has a circulation of a million weekly, was about as obscure a journal of its kind as might be. Then it was converted into a limited company, and most of the capital raised was devoted to one huge prize—

I suppose the greatest ever offered—three thousand pounds. This was the competition. On a fixed date, six months after the first announcement, the directors would appoint a new editor, no indication of their choice being given until the appointment was actually made. The lucky journalist himself would be entirely taken by surprise. His first duty in his new position would be to go down Regent Street and buy himself a silk hat in the latest fashion. He would return to the office, and the new hat would then be filled to the brim with hairpins. These would be counted in the presence of a bishop and a music-hall proprietor, and the competitor who had guessed nearest to the number would receive three thousand pounds. I was the lucky man."

"Do you mean that you gained three thousand pounds?"

"Well, not quite. I ought to have mentioned that the number of guesses one might make was unlimited, but each must be accompanied by a coupon cut from *Soft Things*. I happened to have

"'PERHAPS, DICK,' SAID MRS. TYRELL A LITTLE SHARPLY, 'YOU WILL EXPLAIN WHAT ALL THIS MEANS.'"

ten pounds by me. It was all the savings I possessed, and——"

"Dick, don't tell me that you bought twenty-four hundred copies."

"Not twenty-four hundred, certainly. You see, experimenting cost something. You must deduct what I spent on hairpins and old hats."

"And did they pay up?"

"Like princes. But I had to send my photograph for publication, and it was by this that your son's schoolfellow recognized me. By the way, Walter, they don't mention anything about another photograph. You said they wanted to take me."

"That was a mistake," said Walter hastily.

"But why," said Mrs. Tyrell, "have you kept it such a secret from us?"

"Because they chaffed me in Melbourne so unmercifully. But I am afraid there was another reason."

"What was that?"

"Well, I saw that you and Tom thought better

of me for having made my way in the world. And now the whole murder is out."

"Well, I think it was all very silly. And so your prosperity is a pure accident?"

"You can put it that way. I like to look upon it as a reward for my faith in the directors. I made up my mind that they would need a pretty brainy man for a post like that, and based my calculations on his taking a seven and three-eighths hat. No one else that I heard of went beyond seven and a quarter."

"I expect that it was the editor himself that called," said Max. "I noticed as he was walking away that he had a very large head."

"Very probably, and that is another reason why I must be in next time he calls. He has written a pressing letter, and it would be shabby to refuse. They are preparing a series of articles entitled 'Favourites of Fortune,' and they wish me to stand for number one."

"He is opening the gate now," said Claude.

"I found this in my pocket," said Uncle Dick. "It is not mine."

He produced an envelope containing a sovereign and about fifteen shillings in silver.

"It is mine," said Walter, turning a violent red. "I slipped it into your pocket for safety."

He would sooner have lost the money than that they should know he had believed his uncle to be a hunted bushranger, and had beggared himself to help the outlaw to escape.

"It is all very well for Uncle Dick," growled Max—his uncle was away being interviewed—"he has the money, but I shall be called 'Hat,' and Walter will be called 'Hairpins,' as long as we are at school. You don't seem to care, Walter!"

"No," said Walter blithely; "I don't care a hairpin!"

When the boys were in bed that night, Uncle Dick sat up studying the back numbers of *Soft Things*. He read with a purpose. Whether it was accomplished is not known, for he said noth-

ing. But next morning he gave Walter the mysterious postal order, and a handsome tip in addition. He never commented upon Walter's fit of weeping or upon his other strange doings; nor, in his presence, might any one else do so. Which goes to prove that a man may be a favourite of fortune, and yet remain a thoroughly good fellow.

Blackballed

IT all began with Reggie's cricket club, of which I heard the first whisper one morning in bed. "The cricket club," he was saying, "will have two elevens. I shall be secretary and the man who looks after the ginger beer. All the bats will have cane handles, and the stumps——"

"Yes, I know, Reg," I replied drowsily; "there will be a pavilion with a flower garden in front, and we shall all have new blazers and cricket caps every match."

Reggie shook me impatiently. "You might listen to the rules, after I have taken the trouble to write them down."

This awakened me effectively. So far I had thought that Reggie's talk was a part of one of those interminable tales that he and I were for ever telling one another, wherein objects took the

place of incidents, and fancy was ransacked to satisfy our juvenile craving for "things." Writing pointed to something definite. I recollected now that for some days my brother's conduct had been streaked with mystery. "Go on," I exclaimed impatiently.

" 'Rule one,' " read Reggie. " 'The club shall be managed by a captain and a secretary, two to form a quorum, and every match shall commence with ginger beer.' "

"Reggie!" I cried admiringly.

"I did not make all that up myself. Some of it came from a society dad belongs to at the chapel. I found the card on his dressing-table. I altered it a bit, so as not to have everything the same!"

"But the ginger beer! Where does that come from?"

"Oh, from rule nine on the card. It says, 'Every meeting shall commence with prayer.' That wouldn't do for a cricket club. We must commence with something, so I fixed upon ginger beer."

"I meant," said I, "where does the ginger beer come from?"

This made my brother cross. "What a little flat you are, Arthur! You might as well ask where the brass-headed stumps come from. I do wish you would try not to be such a kid."

"I will try," I answered contritely; "but lots of fellows of my age (I was six) are kids, Reggie. They are indeed."

" 'Rule two. The club shall be open to all lads of good moral character who have attained the age of seven years.' I copied that word for word."

"That's a story," I said, the blood flaming suddenly to my face. "Dad's card does not say seven. I never want to speak to you again."

I turned round and pulled the bedclothes over my ears. Reggie tried to turn my face round again. Of course he succeeded. He was a full two years my senior and main strong. Fortunately, he did not notice how I had been disgracing my six years.

"You did not think I meant to keep you out of

the club, Arthur? I have never left you out of anything, have I? Why, I am always making the fellows let you into things and saying what a little brick you are."

"Why did you put down seven years?" I inquired, only half mollified—"so as to let me come in as a great treat?"

"I never wrote down seven at all. I only pretended to read it for a joke. It is written six. You can see for yourself."

It was six, sure enough. "You are very good to me, Reggie. I am sorry that I cheeked you yesterday."

Then Reggie did something that made me catch my breath. He leant over and kissed me. I laughed excitedly.

"You can't say anything about kids now," said I. "Kissing is as kiddish as anything. It's as kiddish as crying, any day."

Of course I knew that it was not so bad—not quite; but I was still afraid that Reggie might notice my cheeks, and I wanted to stop his mouth.

"When are you going to tell the fellows?" I said, becoming suddenly practical.

"This morning," said Reggie. "When we come home from school this afternoon we shall be members of a proper cricket club."

The issue showed that my brother's forecast was not unduly sanguine. Every boy in the school gave in his name the moment that he heard the first rule. Of the other rules, number eleven providing that there should be no subscription, was perhaps the most liked. The money, Reggie explained, would come from parents and from other people as voluntary contributions. No limit would be put to their generosity. I must say that the parents quite justified my brother's confidence. From the outset money flowed in freely. Our head mistress, Miss Kingsford (it was not our fault that the school was kept by a lady, though some boys most ungenerously reproached us for the fact), gave one half-crown and promised another so soon as we should have won our first match. Reggie did not limit his collecting to our own family. He tackled

dad's visitors, who gave in directly they read the papers. The wisdom of the rule confining membership to lads of high moral character struck every one. Part two of the first rule gave us an additional subscription. "Every game to commence with ginger beer," said an old gentleman who had come in to persuade dad to join him in fighting a water company. "A most salutary regulation, I am sure." He tendered a shilling, insisting upon being enrolled as an honorary member. "I shall certainly come down to your matches and sample that ginger beer," he said, and went away smacking his lips. We were a little disconcerted. If large old gentlemen were to attend and drink at the club's expense, their shillings might be dearly purchased.

Money came in so fast that Reggie, had he been so minded, might have carried it about in gold. Instead, he handed it to the dad, who had undertaken to invest it for the club upon wholesale terms. The boys agreed to this, but stood out for conditions. In return for the fun of spending all

that money the pater must secure the very lowest prices. He must understand, too, that he would not be permitted to make any personal gain out of the transaction; the money he received he must spend or return. Any attempt to keep back a portion for himself, said Nubbles (our captain, nine years old, and stronger than boys of ten), would render him liable to be "persecuted" with the law's utmost rigour. Reggie, in giving father his instructions, omitted this warning against dishonesty, an oversight that in the weeks to come was to appear fraught with tragic consequences. The trouble arose with the ball. Our list said distinctly, "Match ball, best men's"—and as to what a match ball was no one who lived near the Clarence Park could possibly be ignorant. It was a large, soft object, not pedantically spherical, and coloured a rich black. The one contained in my father's parcel was small, very hard, and bright red. The measure showed it to be nine inches round. How far that came short of the park standard we all knew.

"It's not much more than half size!" cried an aggrieved chorus.

"It's all right in the bill," said Nubbles sarcastically. "It's 'Best match ball' there, right enough."

Reggie stood with the offending object in his hand, trying to think of something to say.

"Well?" the boys said impatiently.

"It is a match ball," said Reggie firmly.

The captain took the ball and held it up in front of my brother's eyes.

"Tell me again that *that* is a match ball and I will punch your head!"

"It is a match ball," repeated Reg, and Nubbles did nothing. Instead, my brother was assailed with reproaches. Our name was smirched with dishonourable charges, and we were told that henceforth we must walk through life alone. At last the ordeal came to an end; the mob dispersed. Reggie and I were left standing by ourselves.

"Cheat's sons!" screamed young Smythers, as he disappeared round a corner. Reggie winced.

He felt the insult the more that Smythers was one who got the school a bad name by attending in petticoats.

"Is it a match ball?" I asked. Reggie gave me a look and half my hopes vanished. The remainder left me in the evening when the pater asked about the arrival of the things. "They were all in the box," replied Reggie, "the bats and the stumps and the ball—the red ball."

"That's all right. I hope you will get plenty of fun out of them."

It was wonderful how lightly my father carried it off. It was, then, no blunder of the shopman. The dad *knew* the sort of ball that was being sent, and with this knowledge had charged it in the bill —"Best match ball." The whole thing was very inexplicable.

I don't think I ever remember my father so buoyantly happy as he was that evening. To us, who knew what was threatening him, there was something infinitely pathetic in his unsuspecting happiness. He romped with us until at last he

sank back upon the sofa breathless and exhausted. As he sat there, with his cheeks flushed, his hair all over his forehead, and his grey eyes dancing with good humour, I was conscious of the birth in my heart of a new sentiment. The experience was pleasurable and yet strangely disquieting. Up to this moment I had accepted my father as I did the firmament, and the summer water-carts, as part of the scheme of things. Now, forced to think about him, I had discovered that we were joined together by another tie that all the Nubbleses in the universe could not sever. He was he, and I was I, if there was a dozen crimes urged against him. That iron-grey head was infinitely dearer to me for the black cloud overhanging it. I climbed upon my father's knees and tried to arrange his hair with my fingers, he making comic grimaces when I took the short way with the tangles. "I do like you. I do like you," I said, throwing my arms around his neck.

"Of course you do," he replied. "What a funny little fellow you are!"

"He is decent, isn't he?" I said to my brother when we were both in bed.

"Awfully decent."

"Even if he did what the boys say, he is still decent?" I asked wistfully.

Reggie would not admit the dad's guilt, even hypothetically.

"You know very well he didn't do it."

"I don't believe it is so very wicked, anyhow," I persisted; "there is nothing against it in the Bible."

Here again it appeared I was displaying my reprehensible lack of years.

"I don't care if he did do it. I say, Reg, old man, do you think they will really persecute him?"

My fears on this last point were confirmed the following morning when we reached school. The law was to take its course, Nubbles undertaking to set the mighty engine in motion. There for the time the matter rested. At last the boys began to grow impatient, and one afternoon they asked Nubbles point-blank what he had done. The cap-

tain explained that the process was necessarily a lengthy one. To begin with, they must have the accused's own statement of the affair, which, up to the present had not been obtained. Why, asked the club, not go round and demand this at once? The upshot was that Nubbles, to preserve his threatened position, came home with us and interviewed the dad in the breakfast room. What followed reversed all anticipation. The parties to the case seemed to have changed places. The accused was at his ease and wholly unconcerned, the accuser hesitating and covered with confusion. At the outset the governor made an unaccountable blunder. He got the notion that he was speaking to a very small boy. His tone was positively indulgent. Odder still was the effect of his mistake upon the captain. Nubbles began to dwindle. As the minutes went by the shrinkage was inconceivable. Our austere leader was fast reverting to infancy. His grave self-possession had left him. He stood, poor little one, rubbing one boot nervously on the other, his face the colour of the accusing ball. It would

not have surprised us had he burst into tears. As for the charge, it was never made. The club had expected a black ball—a match one—and this was red. The point of honour was not raised. Nubbles even protested when Reggie, introducing him, referred to the suspicion of foul play. All through the dad did not realize that he stood in a position of deadly peril. He volunteered an explanation, however, which was this. With the ball there was nothing worse amiss than inexperience. When it had seen as much hard service as the park ones it would be equally black. Then Nubbles mumbled himself out of the room. We followed and walked with him towards his home. A load had been lifted from our hearts, but we wanted to hear the dad's acquittal pronounced formally. Nubbles, for his part, was anxious for a word with us. He wanted to close our mouths with regard to the recent interview. He had, he said, dealt very gently with our father on account of the affection that he (Nubbles) had always felt towards ourselves. Had the culprit been any other boys'

father he would have been addressed with far greater severity. Unfortunately, said Nubbles, the boys at Miss Kingsford's were too base to appreciate such high motives. To their mean natures it would appear that he had "funked" Cooks' father, which, as we knew, was not the case. If we would hold our tongues about what had just occurred he would have the charge of fraud shelved until our father's explanation had been tested. It did not seem likely that a red ball should become black, but the thing should be given a fair trial. In the meantime our schoolfellows would be encouraged (by Nubbles) to regard us as equals. In his account of the interview in the parlour Nubbles claimed the right to diverge in places from the path of literary accuracy.

"I am not going to let you make out that the governor funked you," said Reggie bluntly.

Finally it was agreed, for the purposes of the compromise, that Nubbles had addressed the pater with respectful sternness, and the latter had answered with becoming spirit.

In the event Nubbles was strong enough to have this arrangement carried through. He would not even permit the boys to call our father a cheat. The ball was taken into play, and the changes upon its surface was observed as closely as though it had been some newly discovered planet, and we and the others astronomers of rival schools. It was some time before the first difference was marked. The boys would handle the ball after a practice and look at us out of the corners of their eyes.

Then came scratches, a roughening of the surface and—was it fancy?—an increase of bulk. Once the ball turned black in a single night, but some one, no friend to our house, wiped it with a damp cloth and threw our deliverance back weeks. Next the ball took a mottled appearance, a red not over sanguine, pitted with spots that were less than black. At this stage the boys spoke of our father with a sort of curious half sympathy. At the bottom of their remarks was always an assumption of his guilt, but they admitted palliations and were anxious to emphasize the offender's kindlier traits.

There was, for example, the nice way he had treated the club in the matter of the stumps, and the perfect honesty that had characterized the purchase of the cane-handled bats. An entirely bad man, they discovered, might have robbed them in a dozen unattempted ways. In his family relations, too, the boys were willing to admit that our father might be quite admirable. "I've heard, Cook, that your father is a very good man in other things," said Smithson, and he complained bitterly when Reggie punched his head. My brother, by the way, was getting a little anxious. Our schoolfellows were enjoying their own magnanimity thoroughly and were obviously unwilling to acknowledge that it was uncalled for. The pater's character certainly was whitening as the ball daily became more black; but, in case the latter operation should be interrupted by reason of the ball being lost, the reputation of our house would be left eternally a dirty grey. It came about, therefore, that whenever the club played, whether it was a practice game or a proper match (we played

matches, but of those I must speak some other time), Reg and I were to be found guarding the long grass, or the nettles, or some other dangerous spot. We did not play upon the best grounds, and there were some narrow shaves, you may be sure. Once the ball went into a deep thorn hedge. There was a ditch behind and thick nettles. There came a time when it was proposed that the search should be abandoned.

"In you go, Arthur," said Reg. The boys held back the front brambles with stumps at the most likely spot, and I crept in. The ball was in my hand when I came out a few minutes later, but I was scratched dreadfully.

"He is worth the whole crowd!" cried my brother, and the flesh wounds were not felt. They smarted a good deal when we were at home and Reggie was sponging them in the bathroom.

"I am not such a kid, am I?" Reggie's reply was disappointing. Considering my age, I was not a kid to any reprehensible degree. He did not

doubt that I should eventuate into something nobler.

About three weeks from the end of the term, and before the ball had turned thoroughly, we went away to the seaside. We returned for the breaking up, father having promised, but a few days before, to present the prizes. At this ceremony he sat upon the platform with a table in front of him, loaded with handsome books, and with something else that he could not see. On the far side of the prizes and in full sight of the boys was a cricket ball, a match one, large and black as your hat. It was ours, the weeks during which we had been away having worked this change. Nubbles had put it there as a way of undoing a foul wrong. The boys understood the symbol and cheered the dad every time he opened his mouth. He, good man, beamed on us all, quite unconscious that his character in bodily form was lying upon the table exposed to view. And what a glorious character it was! There was not a speck of accusing red upon its entire surface.

We spent the afternoon, Reg and I, upon a bench in Clarence Park, discussing the day's events. Perhaps "discussing" is not the right word.

"He looked awful nice up there," said Reg, referring to the dad.

"There wasn't the teeniest red spot," said I, referring to the cricket ball.

"There is no call now for us to stick up for him," said my brother.

"I shall never again have to go into the pricklies after him," I replied.

"He seems further away from us now, somehow," said Reggie, with a sigh.

"He was more our very own before he was quite black," I remarked regretfully.

We were fairly satisfied, though, upon the whole. We were quite content when we heard the news awaiting us at home. The club had brought round the match ball, now at last in its dusky prime, as a peace-offering to Reggie and myself. In addition they had deposed the club president,

a non-contributing clergyman, and had elected our father to this supreme position in his place—the only case, as a grown-up cousin staying with us remarked, of a man arriving at the highest club honours by reason of a black ball.

THE END.

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